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MARGARET PERCIVAL.

VOL. II.

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MARGARET PERCIVAL.

BY

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ETC.

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OXFORD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MARGARET PERCIVAL.

CHAPTER I.

That conclusion was arrived at in the morning; before night Margaret was in a different frame of mind. The day had been haunted by the one idea, following her in her walks, her conversations, her private studies, and solemn devotions. She could not bear it longer. On the morrow her uncle would be gone, and many weeks might pass before he came again. Writing would be almost as painful as speaking, and less satisfactory; and if she could make but a single effort the hardest task would be over. Mr. Sutherland and George went into the library late in the evening to finish something which they were doing together. The fire had been kept up purposely, and Mr. Sutherland spoke of sitting up late, as he had letters to attend to, and he must leave the Grove early in the morning. Margaret listened, when her mother sent her to bed, and found that they were still talking, but the door soon opened, and she heard George say "good night." Presently afterwards her uncle came up stairs also, and she fancied he had changed his mind. He stopped, however, at her door, knocked, and asked for a paper which he had given her in charge, and which she had put carefully away.

"It is in one of the drawers of the library table," said Margaret. "I will come and look for it."

Mr. Sutherland begged her not to trouble herself; he should find it easily, he had no doubt; but Margaret insisted upon going down again; and, as she went, tried to determine whether she should take advantage of the opportunity, and state her difficulties.

The paper was hidden beneath a few others, and there was a little delay in discovering it; perhaps increased by Margaret's absence of mind. It was produced at last; but still Margaret lingered. Mr. Sutherland stood by the fire, and she thought he looked impatient for her to go.

"Good night," she said, in rather a hesitating voice.

"Good night, my love, and thank you. I shall not be long, for I find that I must put off answering three of my letters till I am at home."

"Then you are not very busy?" asked Margaret, her courage increasing. It seemed extremely foolish to lose such an occasion of seeking his advice, if he really could attend to her!

"No, not at all busy as I expected to be; why did you ask?"

"Because if you were not,"—Margaret stopped, but there was now no receding.

"You would like to stay and talk to me, is that it?" said Mr. Sutherland.

"I should not like it," replied Margaret, smiling; "because I want to ask you about some disagreeable things: but I should be very much obliged if you could listen to me."

Mr. Sutherland wheeled his arm-chair away from the table, and pushed aside his papers. "We will leave them all," he said, "if it is necessary. You

and I may not have opportunities for conversation again, for many a long day."

Margaret thought the preparations rather frightening, and could almost have fancied she was going to confession; but she placed herself opposite, and without allowing any time for reserve to gain the mastery, began: "You said a great deal about fasts and festivals this morning, Uncle Henry, and I think you were right; but the notion was never put into my head before, and I cannot make out what ought to be done,—what I ought to do; and I want you to tell me, if you would be kind enough." Margaret's quick yet faltering voice was a sufficient indication that for some reason or other this personal application was an effort to her.

"It is a difficult subject for us all, my dear Margaret," replied Mr. Sutherland kindly; "but I do not think there can be any doubt as to the duty."

"No one seems to attend to it," said Margaret; "and—you won't be shocked at me—it seems impossible to make oneself singular by beginning. I don't know, indeed, how to set about it."

"But, Margaret, that cannot be a fair argument against any practice."

"No, no," replied Margaret; "but," she added, eagerly, "I do not think you, or any man, can tell a woman's difficulties; how much harder it is for us to put ourselves forward than it is for you; and, I know I am very foolish and wrong in that way, I do so dread people's noticing, and making remarks. You will think me very weak."

"No, my dear; I am sure it is not weakness. The feeling originally is a very right one, and it may serve to help you to discover your duty."

"But I should never be a martyr with such a feeling," said Margaret.

"Yes, you would, if it came to the trial, and you

had a full consciousness of obeying a positive command of God to support you. If it were a question of not stealing, or murdering, you would not be afraid to brave public opinion."

"No," said Margaret, "I hope not."

"But the duty of fasting stands upon different grounds," said Mr. Sutherland. "It is not part of the moral law binding upon all persons, under all circumstances; and although it is plainly inferred to be a duty in the Bible, yet it is accompanied by a clear warning that it is not to be done to be seen of men."

"Then what becomes of the law of the Church?" enquired Margaret. "There ought to be no public fasting."

"That which is public and common ceases to excite remark," replied her uncle. "We are told not to say prayers publicly in the streets, and you might conclude in the same way, that public worship is forbidden; but there is no ostentation in our services, because there is no affectation of singularity. So it was once with fasting."

"And so it ought to be now," observed Margaret.

"Yes, so it ought to be, indeed; but as the state of the Church and of society has altered, and fasting is now acknowledged as a duty only in theory, we must enquire what part we have to act under such a change."

"To fast privately, I suppose," said Margaret; "which is almost impossible."

"I do not say so for all persons," replied her uncle. "There are those who are rulers and guides in the Church, and who are bound to set an open example; but that is not your case."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Margaret.

"And if you step out of your position, and make an open profession, which is not required of you, it

can be no wonder if you bring remarks upon yourself."

"But it seems cowardly," said Margaret, "to shrink from a positive duty."

"I think, my love, your difficulty arises from not clearly perceiving your true position in the Church. What might be very cowardly in me, as a clergyman, may be nothing but humility and modesty in you."

"The early Christians might have reasoned thus," said Margaret, "when they were called on to deny their faith."

"Nay, Margaret, the cases are not in the least analogous. The moral law is distinct from the ecclesiastical law. The first is imperative on all persons, at all times; the latter may and will change: and when any of its commands are become obsolete, however wrongly, it is for persons in authority to revive them openly; but not, perhaps, for young persons situated as you are."

Margaret breathed more freely, yet the dread of cowardice still haunted her.

"Just think," continued her uncle, "what would be the consequence, if all the young ladies in England should take upon themselves publicly to uphold the laws of the Church more strictly than their parents and the clergy?"

"If all young ladies felt as I do," said Margaret, "they would never wish what they did to be known."

"So you think now, and in the commencement singularity would be a great effort to you; but when you had once conquered the first difficulty, all your trouble would be over. It would be your way, — a way professedly more saintly than that of others, and, as such, deserving of and obtaining ad-

miration at the risk of tainting the simplicity of your motives."

"And the rules of the Church will be nothing to me, then, after all?" said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, indeed they will and must be a great deal to you; but in private, without the slightest ostentation."

"And how?" Margaret waited an instant, and then added, hastily, "you do not know, Uncle Henry, how very ignorant I am: if you would only talk to me just as you would to a child."

"And give you minute directions? but that is not quite possible."

"Give me something," said Margaret: "I have been in such perplexity to-day."

"I would give you every thing that could really help you," replied her uncle; "but after all, there must be very much left for yourself. My rules would be extremely simple."

"If I could have any," said Margaret, "I should be contented."

"Then, in the first place, whatever you determine to do in the way of self-denial on the particular days marked by the Church, let it be something which may be adhered to strictly. Do not attempt entire fasting at first, even if you are able to do it without attracting attention, and never practice it at all, if it should be injurious to your health. Begin with abstinence from certain things which would be agreeable to you, and carry out the self-denial through the whole day by checking yourself in your amusements or luxuries. If you are sincere, as I am sure you are, your own observation will guide you more than any thing I can say. I will only name such things as choosing less amusing books, and not giving way to allowable comforts; and perhaps, on the vigils, adding some-

thing especially to your nightly devotions—not what may keep you from sleep, so as to unfit you for the duties of the following day, but that which may serve to mark the particular time."

"These are very trifling things," said Margaret. "I don't mean," she added, blushing, "that I have ever tried to do them, or that they may not be a great deal too difficult for me."

"We think little of trifles," replied Mr. Sutherland, "from a very mistaken idea that austerities are in themselves good; whereas they are only means to an end."

"I know it is my habit of mind to think so," observed Margaret: "I always admire the Saints who bore hard penances."

"Admire them if you will, but it must be because they were humble and holy, not because they wore sackcloth, and scourged themselves. 'Bodily exercise,' Saint Paul warns us, 'profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things.'"

"It seems as if it were scarcely worth while to practise such petty self-denial," said Margaret.

"But if this petty self-denial is the means of leading you to greater piety—if it is constant and sincere, and performed without the possibility of obtaining praise, you will not call it scarcely worth while to practise it then."

"Will it lead to greater piety?" enquired Margaret.

"Not alone; and therefore I would give you other suggestions, if you will listen to me."

Margaret looked at him gratefully, and said: "It is a great comfort to talk to you!"

"Then I would say to you most earnestly, my dear child," continued Mr. Sutherland, "that all you can do will be nothing, if you do not also pray and meditate at these times: that is the great ob-

ject for which they are appointed; to remind us that we are to bestow more thought upon Heaven, and less upon earth. All through the day we are to try and remember the particular event which we are celebrating, and our devotions are to have a special direction in consequence."

"I know how it will be with me," said Margaret, in a tone of sadness. "I shall do the things because they are ordered, but I shall have no feeling about them."

"It is a great danger with us all; but still we must persevere. And another temptation, which you will find, is that of making excuses and allowances for yourself. The little self-denials I have mentioned are not at all easy to persevere in, and when you have nothing external to enforce them, you will be inclined to say that it is better not to attend to them, lest some one should remark it; or you will think that you are not at all the better for them, and so be induced to give them up. General public fasting is much easier, for this reason, than private, because we have public opinion to support us."

"I can foresee all that," said Margaret; "I shall despair if I do not improve."

"One sufficient safeguard against giving up such a system of self-mortification," continued Mr. Sutherland, "is to enter upon it not with any view to its doing you good, but merely as an act of obedience to the Church. With regard to the excuses, you must indeed keep a careful watch over yourself. Let your strictness be a test of your sincerity, and be alarmed when you find yourself yielding, even if the motive be plausible. I could prophesy that you, as well as every other person who has endeavoured to live by rule, will make great discoveries of weakness, by attentively observing your conduct in this respect."

"There is no doubt of that," said Margaret; "and I would rather you thought badly of me than well."

"Margaret, my dear! that is the last thing I could think of you. I am quite certain that you are sincere; and if I give you cautions, it is only because I need them myself."

Margaret's eyes filled with tears. "I never thought, when I began," she said, "how hard it would be to be good."

"Yet we might form some notion of it," replied her uncle, solemnly, "from the price which was paid to ransom us from evil."

Both were silent for a few moments, and then Margaret shewed the turn which her thoughts had taken by saying: "And we are so cold still!—I am, I mean."

"It will not always be so," answered Mr. Sutherland, "and the first perception of a better state of mind is one of exquisite happiness. There is no love like it, Margaret."

"Do you really think that attending to the Church rules will make me feel it?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, if undertaken in the right spirit; but there is danger in all these things; a great danger in the present day."

"How? what?" exclaimed Margaret, quickly. "I thought I must be safe, now."

"The Church is the visible representative of our Lord's government upon earth," said Mr. Sutherland; "as such, it has the highest claims upon our allegiance,—but it is only for His sake. We may seek to advance the Church merely for itself; we may be strictly obedient to rules and rubrics; zealous in making converts; and even munificent in giving money; and all the time we may not be

serving God. We may be making an idol of the building, instead of worshipping Him who dwells within it." Margaret sighed deeply. "I will tell you one way to guard against this mistake," continued her uncle: "Do not talk upon such subjects, if you can help it, to any persons but those who can either give you advice, or whom you know well to be very much in earnest. Even with them, reserve is better than too much openness. Look at this," he continued, taking up a small volume of poetry which lay beside him, "it expresses exactly what I mean:—

> "'Prune thou thy words, the thoughts control
> That o'er thee swell and throng;
> They will condense within thy soul,
> And change to purpose strong.'"

"But if a subject interests one greatly ——" began Margaret.

"The more painful it will be to discuss it, when it is only discussion," replied Mr. Sutherland. "There has sprung up in these days, what I scarcely know how to designate but as a sort of high Church cant, which is just as injurious, though perhaps not quite as disagreeable as what is commonly so called. Persons no sooner meet than they enter upon Church architecture, daily services, and rubrics, peculiar preachers and peculiar books, and from thence they go on to convents and monasteries, and sisters of charity, and perhaps praise a life of asceticism; and when they part it seems that they have had a most innocent useful conversation."

"And are not such subjects innocent?" said Margaret.

"Innocent in themselves, and even sacred, many of them: for that reason all the more dangerous if brought forward lightly. No one can go away from conversing upon such topics in any spirit but

that of humility and deep earnestness, without doing material injury to his own spiritual character."

"But I may talk to you," said Margaret.

"Yes; talk and write to me about any and every thing, but not to the rest of the world. Though, remember, I am only giving you a general principle to be applied as your own judgment shall see fit."

"It will be long before I shall be good enough to talk," said Margaret.

"That is precisely the feeling I should wish you to have, and the more you act upon it, the more real you will become. I am rather of opinion that it is not good for us openly to praise any course of life, until we are sure that we should be willing to adopt it: the probability is, if we do, that we shall be satisfied with the admiration only."

Margaret stood, aware that she ought to depart, and yet unwilling to go. "When you are away," she said, "difficulties will arise, and I shall have no one to help me."

"No human help," said Mr. Sutherland; "but far more than sufficient from another source. You will never forget prayer, and your Bible, and the Holy Communion."

"Mamma will not always go to the Communion," said Margaret.

"Then, my love, you must go alone. Say that you wish it, and you cannot be refused. There is no private way of performing that duty, and it is imperative."

"And if it does not give me comfort?" said Margaret.

"Who are we, Margaret, that we should think of comfort? But it must and will come at last if you persevere. When we begin the practice as a duty, with sufficient preparation and reverence, it

will assuredly turn into a blessing; how great, no words of mine could tell you."

"Shall I ever be like you?" said Margaret, as she leant over her uncle's chair, to wish him good night. Mr. Sutherland almost drew back, and in a still more serious tone, he said:—

"Margaret, you would never use such language if you knew the pain which it causes me. I have spoken to you now as a clergyman, but I could speak as one who has to bear the same difficulties, and the burden of the sins of eight and thirty years."

Margaret's only answer was a silent kiss. The remembrance of Father Andrea flashed across her, but at the moment he did not awaken in her mind more interest and reverence than her uncle.

CHAPTER II.

Once more the summer sky was unclouded, and the fresh foliage of the trees, the bright verdure of the park and the lawn, and the varied colours of the flowers, made even the desolate Henningsley assume a cheerful aspect. The Countess Novera stood with Father Andrea and Lucia by the open stone balustrade, in front of the house, and surveyed the landscape before her with feelings of reverential gratitude.

"The works of God are every where very beautiful, father," she said. "Even in Italy there are few scenes more lovely than this."

"It is not equal to Devonshire," remarked Lucia.

The Countess was hurt, for she was not inclined for a comparison, still less for one which implied discontent. "You should have remained in Devonshire, Lucia," she replied; and the sentence was scarcely ended when Lucia had turned proudly aside, and the Countess sighed over her own unguardedness. "Poor child!" she said, putting her arm around her young charge; "it is rather a change for you from all that gaiety to this loneliness; but you will meet your first friends soon. Mrs. St. Aubyn will be here directly she knows that we are arrived; and Father Andrea and I have agreed that it is better for me not to shut myself up too much; so we will have as much society and amusement as the old house can give us."

Lucia's countenance rather brightened at the

idea ; but Father Andrea's grew clouded, and, as Lucia, after an earnest " mille grazie, Signora," walked away to gather some flowers, he said —

" Happiness is dearly purchased at the price of simplicity of mind."

" Was I wrong ?" enquired the Countess. " I thought you had said it would be the best thing both for her and myself."

" Yes, but I regret the necessity. I hoped that her love for you would have satisfied her, wherever she might be."

" Ah, father, then even you, after all your experience, do not know a woman's heart! Undivided affection, that is what it must give and receive ; and Lucia knows that such she cannot have from me. She will be happy when she is married, but not till then."

" Happy ?—never !" exclaimed the father, emphatically. " Jealousy in friendship must be jealousy in love likewise, and exclusive earthly affection is not necessarily an ingredient in happiness. Lucia will be her own self-tormentor until she dies."

" I can scarcely blame her, father," said the Countess. " My own life would have been miserable, if it had not found an object on which to expand its affections ; and now, that all is passed as a beautiful dream, I am still blessed in the remembrance of what once was ; and I can venture more hopefully to bestow the love which is still remaining. So it would be with Lucia."

" But not if her heart grows worldly," replied the confessor. " In that case she will never know a deep, enduring attachment ; for her feelings will all be selfish. I can see that her character is deteriorating."

" And what can we do ?" asked the Countess ; " return to Italy ?"

"That is scarcely advisable, as yet; there is much to be arranged about your property; and"—he turned to see that Lucia was not near, and added, "we must not forget Miss Percival."

"Forget!" repeated the Countess; "no, impossible. I have anticipated being with her as my great comfort in returning. But are you sure that you are as sanguine of success as when we parted?"

"Nearly so. I see a tone running through her letters, constrained though they sometimes are, which tells me that her interest in our faith still remains. She speaks more of her own Church, it is true; but her imagination is too vivid to be long satisfied with it."

"I have some hope from her kindness to that poor girl," said the Countess, "she has visited her so constantly."

"Yes, and of her also I would speak, my daughter. It is necessary that she should be removed from her home: she must not die amongst heretics. Do you think you could receive her here?"

The Countess looked at him in extreme surprise.

"Doubtless, father, if requisite; but can it be good to take her from her friends? Forgive me for asking."

"They have ceased to be her friends," he replied; "nay, they are now her greatest enemies, for they would debar her from the last offices of the Church, and her hours are apparently numbered. I have enquired concerning her this morning, and I am told that she can scarcely live another week."

"I will go instantly, and give orders," said the Countess, walking towards the house; "but," she added, and stopped to consider, "how can it be done? No force can be used in such a case; and the family will never consent."

"My hope is in Miss Percival," said Father An-

drea. "She may be listened to when you would not be heard. Could you not ask her to come to you, that we might talk over the matter?"

"I had half expected her this afternoon," replied Beatrice, "for I wrote to her to say that I should be at home, and alone; but if this case is so serious, perhaps I had better send for her at once."

"You do not wish to delay," said Father Andrea, with a smile.

"No. I confess the morning has seemed very long; but, father, I would conquer this and every other affection, if you thought it right."

"Go on, my daughter," replied the confessor; "you have entered upon a course which will bring glory and honour to yourself, and salvation to her you love."

The Countess stood for a moment in meditation; in fancy, her end was achieved, and Margaret was a Romanist; but there were many steps to be trodden before that hope could be reality, and waking up from a pleasant dream, she re-entered the house.

Margaret Percival's outward employments were little altered since, nearly eight months before, she had caught the last glimpse of the Countess Novera. Still she sat in the morning in the school-room, with the children, and looked out upon the secluded garden, though it was now gay and sunshiny, and birds sang merrily amongst the trees, and hopped upon the walks; and flies crawled upon the window; and wasps buzzed around her head, to the trial of her own nerves, and the effectual distraction of the children's attention.

"It is the feast of St. Barnabas to-day," said Harriet, taking down her Bible and Prayer Book from the shelf. "We shall read the epistle and gospel."

"And say the collect," added Grace. "I like collects much better than hymns, they are so much shorter."

"Grace should not like collects for that reason, Margaret, should she?" asked Harriet.

"No, certainly not; but Grace will know better by and by. Collects are prayers, and the reason you learn them now is that you may have them always ready when you want to know how to pray."

"And we shall read about the fasts and festivals," said Philip; "I like that book."

"And I like the half-holiday!" exclaimed Grace, clapping her hands.

Margaret motioned for silence, and the reading began. The questions, when it was ended, were very simple and short; but there was an earnestness in Margaret's manner when she spoke to them of him, who was called "the son of Consolation," which even children so young could not fail to appreciate. A deep feeling was in her own heart. When she dwelt upon the blessing of giving comfort, visiting the sick, and assisting the poor, fancy carried her to the scene of suffering which she had witnessed on the previous day — the dying bed of Rhoda Newbolt.

"You can't be exactly like St. Barnabas, Margaret," said Harriet, "because you are a woman; but I think you would be, else."

"Because she goes to the cottages?" asked Grace.

"No, Grace," replied Margaret, smiling; "I am afraid no going to cottages will make us like St. Barnabas; for that is only doing the sort of things which he did, and all the time we may not be in heart the least like him."

"But don't you feel like him when you go to see

the Roman Catholic girl?" asked Philip. "Miss Debrett's Susan declares you are kinder to her than any one."

Such home questions were awkward, and Margaret, evading the answer, said that it was not so much whether we were sorry for people in any one instance, which showed whether we were like St. Barnabas; but whether we were always trying to be kind to all persons, and understand why they were unhappy, and were willing to put ourselves out of our way for them, as St. Barnabas did when he went from Antioch to Jerusalem. Grace brought forward the map directly, to look for the places, and whilst she was finding them, Harriet whispered to her sister —

"I think Uncle Henry is a great deal more like St. Barnabas than Colonel Clive is!"

"Yes, that he is," said Philip, who had heard the observation.

"Symonds says that Colonel Clive makes Agatha cry: and I dare say St. Barnabas never made any one cry."

Margaret was both perplexed and annoyed. "I don't see how Symonds can tell about any thing at Ashington," she replied; "so it is very foolish for him to talk; but, you know, I cry, and we all cry sometimes."

"And Philip cried yesterday," exclaimed Grace, laughing.

Philip's cheek was crimsoned in an instant.

"But St. Barnabas would not have laughed at him about it, Grace," said Margaret; "what he would have done would have been to comfort him, to console him; because he is called — what?"

"The son of Consolation," answered Grace, with more timidity than usual.

"Then, because it is the feast of St. Barnabas, we

will all try and be like sons of consolation. We will see how kind we can be to one another."

Margaret closed her book, the children came round her for the kiss with which the Scripture reading was always concluded, and then the few half-holiday lessons proceeded. Margaret liked to think it was the feast of St. Barnabas. She had learnt to take pleasure in festival days, to associate agreeable things with them; some additional leisure and favourite pursuits, with which she indulged herself; and it was satisfactory also to know that the children were not growing up, as she had done, without signs and land-marks for the year. Margaret had begun her system with them gradually, as its benefits and necessity had been perceived when tried upon herself. She had, in her own case, carefully followed her uncle's directions with regard to the fasts and festivals of the Church, and she was becoming more and more sensible of their good effect upon her tone of mind; how they gave a fixed direction to her meditations; took her from thoughts of herself; forced her to look more carefully into the Bible, to study characters, and bring out particular points bearing upon them; and how, by degrees, they were weaning her from exclusiveness and solitariness of feeling, and showing her that she was one of a mighty body, deriving its existence from centuries gone by, and destined to carry its future life into eternity. Without daily services; without a clergyman at hand to assist her; without the advantage of early instruction in Church principles, Margaret was yet growing day by day in practice, though not always in feeling, a consistent daughter of the English Church. She read the appointed psalms and lessons morning and evening, not as a form, but as the specified instructions of the Church, and with a view of keeping

up, as much as possible, the sense of unity and communion with those who were more happily circumstanced. She fixed her rule of discipline, and adhered to it with sufficient strictness to assure herself of sincerity, though not without many times falling into the temptations of which her uncle had spoken. She set aside the tenth part of her yearly allowance, as the tithe required by God for charitable purposes; more she gave, if possible, but this was the lowest amount; and in all these things there was a sense of order and submission which to an imaginative mind was peculiarly beneficial. It was true that the psalms and lessons did not meet every particular frame of mind; but because she read them, there was no reason why she should not besides turn to the passages which were peculiarly applicable to the moment; and the external rule was often a means of teaching her the peculiar fitness and beauty of every part of the Bible; its power of adaptation to all varieties of temper and circumstance, since historical events or obscure prophecies, which she would never have selected herself, thus brought lessons of instruction to her heart. Charles the First, when preparing for a violent death, is not the only person who has found the lesson for the day so exactly suited to his need as to appear providentially appointed to meet it. Under such a system, Margaret's mind was becoming gradually more subdued and equable; but the world saw little of it. She had always been cheerful, and agreeable, and energetic; and this she was still. It was in the quietness of her own mind that Margaret felt the change. She could bend to her mother's watchfulness and interference, because obedience was now becoming her habitual temper; and she could bear with the children's faults, because she felt keenly alive to her own. Some things, indeed, were

still serious trials. Such had been, at first, Mrs. Percival's objections to the children's having half-holidays to mark the festival days, and reading the epistle and gospel appointed. Margaret was for the moment inclined to be hopeless of ever doing any thing towards imbuing them with Church principles; but she yielded with a good grace, and comforted herself by "making known her request" where she knew it could not but be heard; and soon afterwards Mrs. Percival was brought to consent. George had come to his sister's aid, and declared it was a common practice at public schools to keep saints' days, so that there could be nothing popish in it; and Mrs. Percival having no better ground for objection, at length gave up the point. There were other difficulties in the practice of the Church, as exhibited before her, which often weighed upon Margaret's mind, and were, in fact, her great danger and stumblingblock. They served to weaken her imperfect faith, and to make her at times captious and discontented; but this evil was, as yet, hidden from her own view. The spirit of criticism brought few visibly bad results, for Margaret herself obeyed whilst she complained of the general laxity; but it stood in the way of any real reverence for the Church; and her obedience was not sufficiently profound to be satisfying. Still this was but the germ of unhappiness, and Margaret's chief trial now arose from a very different source — Agatha's countenance was betraying the secret of a wretched home. Unquiet spirits, forced merriment, constant society, and perpetual demands for change of scene, were the too certain indications that domestic peace was wanting. Symonds had reported truly, when he said that the Colonel made his wife cry. Agatha's was not the spirit to submit meekly, nor, indeed, to shew that she submitted at all. She braved her husband

when they were together, but she gave full vent to her bitterness of spirit when alone; and the servants, who always contrive to know what their masters and mistresses desire to hide, reported that Mrs. Clive spent hours locked up in her room, sobbing; and often pretended a headache, merely because she could not make up her mind to meet her husband. Agatha might have borne opposition in great things, but it was the pettiness of her husband's obstinacy which exasperated her. Having no occupation, and no tastes, he had full leisure to inquire into his household economy; and, with the assistance of Mrs. St. Aubyn, he made himself acquainted with its most minute details. All this, however, Agatha might have endured, if she had not been ashamed of him. After sacrificing private happiness for public admiration, she found that she had purchased public censure and contempt. Eyes were fixed upon her when she walked or drove, and voices murmured when she entered a room, but it was not to point out the lovely wife of the man of fortune, but to cast a slur upon the cold-hearted girl who had sold herself for the sake of a tinsel splendour. The world has no respect for its worshippers, and even when it most smiles upon them, it is the most inclined to make sport of their folly. Margaret had had little real intercourse with her sister. They had been parted during the spring months, which Colonel Clive always spent in London; but Agatha was now returned, looking fagged and unhappy. Ashington was to be filled with visitors during the summer, and there was a hope that constant society might be a preservative to her peace of mind, or, at least, divert her; but the disease was, in reality, incurable. Agatha was wearied beyond endurance by a domestic tête-a-tête, and irritated to an equal degree by watching her hus-

band in company. How it was to end, Margaret could not see; she could scarcely hope that it would be well, for the suffering had been purchased wilfully.

But there were happy thoughts in Margaret's mind on the bright festival of St. Barnabas, which soon chased away all of a sadder hue. Even when she remembered poor Rhoda and her sufferings, she remembered also that the Countess Novera was at hand to assist her. Margaret had been delighting herself for some weeks with the prospect of the Countess's return, and had heard from her directly she arrived. She intended, if possible, to walk to Henningsley in the afternoon; but a second note from Beatrice, received before the children's lessons were finished, made her apply at once to her mother for permission to go alone. Mrs. Percival demurred, which was her usual custom: she said that it was very inconvenient; that the children would do mischief in the garden; that she was not inclined to take them out herself; — but all these were merely the objections of habit, and very well pleased in her heart that Margaret should be in the Countess's confidence, she at last gave her consent.

CHAPTER III.

Father Andrea was seen walking in the park, as Margaret approached the lodge at Henningsley. He had apparently been expecting her, for he came towards her immediately, and shook hands with marked cordiality. Lucia was with him; but her manner was strikingly different. She bowed coldly, and replied in few words to Margaret's civilities, and some minutes afterwards, with a slight apology, turned away towards a gardener's cottage. Margaret could not help wondering at the charm which Mrs. St. Aubyn had found in a person so unconciliating; but Lucia had never particularly attracted her notice, and she soon forgot her in the pleasure of again speaking to Father Andrea. The confessor was anxious and curious to discover whether any portion of the influence, which he thought he had acquired, had been lost during his absence. He had read all Margaret's letters, but they were not unreserved enough to give him the full knowledge of her character which he desired. Her admiration of Massillon even was confined to general terms; and though in occasional sentences he had discovered as he said to the Countess, that she still took an interest in the Romish Church, it was not sufficient to give him more than a general hope of at length gaining his end.

"We have been absent longer than we had anticipated," he said, in answer to Margaret's expressions of pleasure at seeing Henningsley again inhabited.

"The Countess was detained in London some weeks; but she has been longing to be at home."

"And can she really think this her home?" said Margaret. "It has always been my fear that no such place could be found for her in any country but Italy."

"The Countess has a buoyant, energetic mind," replied the confessor. "She can make a home wherever she can make duties; and there is much to attach her to England — to Henningsley especially."

"She is so kind to the poor," said Margaret.

"And Miss Percival is so kind during her absence. The Countess is most desirous to thank you for your attention to that poor girl."

Margaret blushed, but felt pleased. "It has been very little that I could do," she said. "Bodily relief the Countess has given fully, and for other things there was too great a barrier between us."

"And why so?" inquired the confessor. "Human nature and human feelings are the same in Catholics and Protestants."

"But spiritual feelings are not," replied Margaret.

"It may be so," continued Father Andrea; "but it is a harsh opinion which you entertain of us, Miss Percival, if you think that we cannot value charity, let it come from whom it may, or that we do not take the deepest — yes," he added earnestly, "the very deepest interest in those who are separated from us so widely."

"Rhoda Newbolt is a person to attract sympathy from all persons," said Margaret.

"She is a very peculiar character," replied Father Andrea; "raised by her tone of mind — I might add by her religion — above her natural sta-

tion, yet retaining a great simplicity, which is scarcely to be found in the higher ranks of life."

Margaret was aware that she should soon be led into unreserve, if this conversation continued. Father Andrea's manner was so paternal, and yet so courteous and respectful, that against her will it influenced her, whenever she was in his company. For a short space she imposed silence upon herself, being determined that on this, their first meeting after months of absence, she would not be induced to enter upon any but common subjects. It was always painful to her to feel that she had been led to speak of herself to any person whom she had not long known, yet the confessor's tone of conversation always seemed to lead to this point. Even when discoursing upon general subjects, he appeared still to have in view the character of the particular person whom he was addressing; and this tacit avowal of an acquaintance with the hidden thoughts exercised a species of fascination over his hearers. Margaret had experienced it when he described the missions of the Jesuits, appealing, as if by an intuitive knowledge of her disposition, to the vivid imagination which was so often leading her astray; and now he seemed about to seize upon her sympathy in the poor girl, to extract from it some better acquaintance of the light in which she regarded the members of the Romish Church. Margaret did not see any design in this; she only thought that Father Andrea was a person to draw her out of herself, and that she would be upon her guard against him. But the silence was understood, it was a thoughtful one, and Father Andrea was well pleased that Margaret should be sensible of his power.

"I see the Countess in the garden," he said, as they drew near the house; "I will leave her to tell

you her request alone. When you have determined whether you will be able to assist us, I shall be most willing to lend my aid also."

He opened the gate into the shrubbery, bowed, and withdrew; and Margaret advanced to meet the Countess.

"I thought you would come," exclaimed Beatrice, as with a foreign eagerness of manner which, in the present instance, suited well with her real feelings, she took Margaret's hand in both her's.

"Your note was a command," said Margaret.

"I was sure it would be so to you; other persons, with your constant engagements, might have excused themselves."

"But not in a case of charity," said Margaret; "though I must own," she added, with a smile, "that it was charity to myself which was the great inducement. I did indeed wish much to see you."

The Countess again pressed her hand warmly, and led the way to the terrace.

"I could talk to you of many things," she said, "and ask many questions, but I will not lose the time now. You were walking with Father Andrea — has he told you why I wished to see you?"

"No," replied Margaret; "but I conjectured it must be something concerning Rhoda Newbolt. She is sinking rapidly."

"Yes, so Father Andrea has informed me. He is anxious to take a strange step; he wishes her to be removed here; but how will it be possible?"

"In her present state!" exclaimed Margaret, "she could scarcely bear it."

"It is not that so much: I think we might contrive some means of effecting her removal if it were determined on; but I fear her family will not hear of it."

"No," replied Margaret; "they are more than ever distressed at her ——"

She stopped; but the Countess took up the sentence and added, —

"Her conversion. You need not be afraid of hurting me. We, who believe we are in possession of the truth, can well bear with a difference of opinion."

Truth! the word forced itself into Margaret's mind, there to haunt her memory, and to awaken again the question which of late had slumbered, and which she thought was answered,—where truth was to be found.

"Father Andrea has had a difficulty in proposing this scheme," the Countess continued; "it will involve much care and trouble to myself and my household; but on talking it over with him, I see that he has, as usual, benevolence and right judgment on his side. Where the poor girl now is, her dying hours must be harassed by contention, and she will probably be debarred from the last rites of religion. No sacrifice of mine can be what such a trial would be for her; and even if it were not so, she is my equal, my sister in the sight of God."

Margaret looked upon the Countess's lovely face, and marvelled that she should ever have traced in it a taint of pride. But it was not the pride of station which was the temptation of the highborn, carefully nurtured daughter of the Viscount de Lisle. Beatrice could humble herself to her inferiors, she could be courteous and considerate to her acquaintances, she could throw aside distinctions of rank, and love, even as she now was beginning to love Margaret Percival; but she exacted in return, submission to her will and deference to her opinion. The pride of a commanding spirit was the failing

point in her character, and this had never, in Margaret's sight, been brought into view.

"I would go myself and make this request," pursued the Countess, "if I could foresee any probability of doing good; but my mere presence would be obnoxious, and Father Andrea dares not now enter the cottage. Our only hope is in ——"

"Me!" exclaimed Margaret; "but upon what grounds could I place it?"

"You may urge," replied Beatrice, "that it is in vain to hope for any change of faith now; that it can only be wretchedness to the parents to be with their daughter, when there is so little accordance of opinion; and you may suggest that, as my tenants, they are bound to have some respect for my wishes. The last argument, I have reason to think, may be a cogent one with the father."

"And Rhoda herself?" said Margaret.

"You must, of course, consult her first; but I have scarcely a doubt as to her consent. A person whom we could trust went to the cottage this morning, and learnt that she is lying still and without much pain, but greatly distressed in mind. Her mother's violence at such a time must be scarcely endurable."

"And if I can prevail upon her to accept the offer, when may I say you are prepared to receive her?"

"Immediately. I have already given the necessary orders, and in the course of a few hours all will be ready for her."

"She will die here," said Margaret, thoughtfully.

"Yes, but she will die in peace."

"I was not thinking of her," continued Margaret.

"Nor of my comfort, I hope," exclaimed the Countess.

"Nor exactly of that," replied Margaret; "and

yet it was something connected with it. I am afraid I should not have considered such a duty incumbent upon me."

"Father Andrea shall tell us which can lay claim to the highest virtue," said the Countess, lightly, as she went to meet the confessor, who just then appeared in the garden, — "you, for braving Mrs. Newbolt's fury, or I, for simply allowing her daughter to occupy a room in my house. But seriously," she added, assuming a different tone, "we are both, I hope, wishing to be of use, and yours may be the greater effort of the two."

Margaret could not agree. To follow in the wake of benevolence was not, she thought, equal to setting the example; and she would have fallen into a reverie upon the comparative probability of Protestants' and Romanists' kindness of heart, but for the presence of the Countess and the approach of the confessor. The plan of proceeding was soon settled. Margaret was to go directly to the cottage, and endeavour to obtain a private interview with Rhoda, which, as she was now wholly confined to her bed-room, was not likely to be difficult. If she consented to the proposed arrangement, Margaret was then to use her utmost tact in endeavouring to gain Mrs. Newbolt's permission for her daughter's immediate removal to Henningsley. As she left the Countess, Margaret pondered upon the curious, yet natural concurrence of circumstances, which had thus brought her into co-operation with persons whose religion was different from her own. She was not exactly satisfied with the position which she occupied, though she did not see how it could have been avoided. Her uncle would certainly think it strange if he knew how she had gradually gained the Countess's confidence, and was now working with her; perhaps he might not approve.

Margaret regretted her first reserve; it had prevented her from obtaining a clear idea of his opinions, when he said that there was danger in an intimacy with a Romanist. Yet she could not absolutely blame herself; she had meant no harm, and she did not see that any harm would arise from it. In the present case she was undoubtedly doing a deed of charity. The idea of changing Rhoda's belief, at such a time of suffering, seemed preposterous; and if it were right, she was not the person to attempt it. All that lay in her power was to assist in soothing the poor girl's dying moments, and to place her, if possible, amongst friends who would minister to her bodily and spiritual wants. With such thoughts Margaret entered the cottage. The lower room was empty, and the only sounds to be heard were the ticking of the clock, and the short, almost incessant cough of the suffering girl, immediately above. Margaret softly called the names of Mrs. Newbolt and her youngest daughter; but receiving no answer, she opened the door at the foot of the steep little staircase, and went up. The chamber was small, and less scrupulously neat than might have been expected from the appearance of the apartment below. It showed that the comfort of the invalid was neglected, and Margaret knew how much annoyance even this alone would cause. Rhoda was sitting up in her bed, supported by pillows. Her face was now so thin and pale, as scarcely to retain any trace of its former expression; her sunken eyes were glaringly brilliant, and a deep shadow marked their outline, as well as that of the black, feverish lips. Margaret was conscious of a change even since she had last seen her.

"Poor Rhoda, you are very ill," she said, as she went up to the bed-side, and took hold of the attenuated hand which rested on the coverlid.

"Very," was the whispered answer; "worse since you were here;" and then Margaret only caught the words, "soon over," for a fit of coughing interrupted the sentence.

"You must not attempt to talk, Rhoda," said Margaret, whilst she drew a chair near, and sat down. "If you could listen to me, it might not do you any harm."

"Harm! no, good;" and Rhoda half smiled.

Margaret held up her finger for silence, and went on: "It grieves me so to see you in this state, Rhoda; and I want to do you good if I can; to make you happier. Yes, I know what you would say," she added, as the poor girl feebly shook her head. "I know what you suffer; all the pain, and fever, and coughing; I cannot help that; but if you were not here, you might be able to have the prayers you require, and that would be a blessing."

Rhoda's eyes were raised for a moment with an expression of fervent devotion, and then a mist gathered over them, and tears rolled slowly down her cheek.

Margaret wiped them away for her, and said: "If you were not here you would be better in mind; and I think, perhaps, I might be able to manage a change, if I could gain your mother's consent."

Rhoda looked at her attentively whilst she spoke; but at the last words she turned away her face in evident disappointment.

"I only want to know whether you would like it; whether you would go to Henningsley, if the Countess Novera could receive you."

"No, no, too grand! not for me!" whispered Rhoda, her trembling hand and eager eye showing how greatly she was agitated by the proposal.

Margaret was distressed, and afraid that she had

been mistaken in her plan of proceeding. But Father Andrea had advised it, under the idea that Mrs. Newbolt's anger, when first the proposal should be made, might otherwise deter her daughter from openly expressing her inclinations.

"But if the Countess wishes it, Rhoda," continued Margaret, "you would not refuse her?"

"She cannot," said Rhoda hastily; "I must die."

Her head drooped, as if she were almost exhausted; and Margaret, taking a bottle of scent from her reticule, endeavoured to refresh her by touching her forehead with it.

"So very kind," said Rhoda, trying to look up again.

"I would do any thing for you, Rhoda," replied Margaret; "but you would be much better off at Henningsley. If you would only say that you wish to go, I will try to persuade your mother to consent."

"Too much happiness," whispered Rhoda; and then, whilst her eyes flashed eagerly, she added, so energetically as to startle Margaret,—"The blessing of Heaven be upon you both!"

Rhoda's gratitude was received in silence; and returning to the subject of her visit, Margaret continued: "Perhaps your mother will be here shortly, and I can try what she will say, if you do not object; but I must hear your answer first. The Countess is having a room prepared for you, and she will send her carriage to fetch you; and when you are there, Father Andrea will be near you to pray for you, and to give you—" Margaret paused — she felt herself in a false position. How could it be her business to act the part of a Romanist? — Rhoda moved her lips in answer, and Margaret stooped forward to catch the words which she uttered.

"Only decide, yes or no," she added; "that is all."

Rhoda said something about the rites of the Church, and Margaret, believing that it would be her greatest inducement, reminded her that the last sacrament of extreme unction would, perhaps, be denied her, if she remained where she was. Again, whilst she spoke the words, her heart reproached her as if she were in some way a traitor to her own Church. Rhoda did not need to be reminded of that which for weeks had daily and nightly been a burden upon her spirits; and was about to reply when her mother's voice was heard below.

"Keep her away," she said, quickly; and then feebly clasping her hands, she added,—"May God pardon me! she is my mother."

"Yes," replied Margaret; "you owe her every duty; but you will never be at peace whilst you remain here; at Henningsley she may come and see you. Shall I ask her now?"

Rhoda pointed to the door, and murmuring, "if you will:—our Lord and the Holy Virgin reward you for your kindness!" She closed her eyes, and her lips moved as if in prayer. Margaret lingered for a moment, unwilling to leave her alone; but finding that she remained tranquil, and without taking any further notice of her presence, went down stairs.

The part which she had now to act was a difficult one; and her first precaution was to close the door at the foot of the stairs, that poor Rhoda might not be disturbed by the violence of temper which she fully expected to encounter.

Mrs. Newbolt, however, was in a particularly placid humour, and the conversation at first proceeded very amicably.

Margaret heard a minute history of Rhoda's sufferings, and did not attempt to stop the lament-

ations over her fatal delusions, little as she could join in them.

Mrs. Newbolt's own errors appeared much greater than her daughter's; and Margaret's sympathies were so aroused for the latter, that although Rhoda's concluding words had startled her, as expressions of a similar kind had often done before, she could not bear to believe that they involved any essential mistake in doctrine; and whilst Mrs. Newbolt ran on in her ordinary strain of ignorance and self-conceit, she began to consider whether, after all, there was any harm in seeking the intercession of her who had been "highly-favoured," and "blessed among women," and to doubt whether Romanists did, in reality, carry their reverence too far.

Mrs. Newbolt at last ceased speaking; and then Margaret ventured to say that, however distressing it might be to a mother to know that her child was dying in error, it was too late to endeavour to change her opinions; all that could be done was to make her as easy as circumstances would allow. To this, however, Mrs. Newbolt would not agree.

"She would never despair," she said; "nothing should hinder her from bearing testimony to the truth, even to the last minute of her child's life."

If this speech had been made by a Romanist, Margaret might have considered it worthy of admiration for its zeal; as coming from an extravagant Dissenter, it seemed only fanaticism.

"You must be in a great deal of trouble," she said; "it seems a pity that Rhoda should have been brought here at all."

"Yes, pity indeed! but it wasn't my doing; 'twas her father, and all the neighbours. I knew 'twould be the death of me when I said yes."

Margaret with difficulty refrained from a smile, as she looked at the portly figure and florid com-

plexion before her. Death, from worry of mind, was probably the last event which would have been prophesied for Mrs. Newbolt.

"If there were any prospect of convincing Rhoda that she is wrong," she replied, "there might be some reason for talking to her upon the subject; but, as it is, it certainly seems to me, that it would be better both for you and for her that she should be in some other situation, if she were well enough to be moved."

Mrs. Newbolt's glance was one of suspicion; but Dr. Percival's family were such decided Protestants, that however she might condemn them on other points, as blind followers of a formal Church, she could not suppose them to be in league with Romanists. Margaret guessed what was passing in her mind, and saw at once that openness would be her wisest course.

"I dare say you will think it very strange, Mrs. Newbolt," she said; "but I cannot help believing that you would be happier. I have been commissioned to ask whether you would consent to Rhoda's being removed, in case she is willing and able to bear the fatigue?"

"Moved, where to? Who's to take a child from her parents?" exclaimed Mrs. Newbolt; the latent affection of a mother aroused at such a proposal.

Margaret mildly explained that there was not the least notion of using force; that it was merely a plan for her consideration; and she then mentioned the Countess Novera's name, stating her wishes, and assuring Mrs. Newbolt that every possible care would be taken of her daughter, and that she herself would be able to see her at any moment. "The Countess," she added, "would not have mentioned such a thing, had she not known how much distress Rhoda's religious belief must cause to

her family, and considered it probable that all parties would be more comfortable if they were separate."

Margaret had thought herself fully prepared for the storm which was to follow; but she was mistaken. No imagination such as hers could equal the reality. Coarse abuse, and violent condemnation, and peremptory refusals made her at first repent her boldness; but between the short pauses, Rhoda's racking cough was heard in the room above, and Margaret, remembering what she would have to bear if the plan failed, still stood her ground. After the lapse of twenty minutes, she was almost about to give up the attempt, when an unexpected assistant came to her support. It was the father; a cool-judging, hard-minded man, a Wesleyan in name, but scarcely adhering to any particular belief in practice. Margaret had always supposed him to be controlled by his wife, and so he was in many cases, in which merely the peace of his household was concerned; but in the present instance there was something more important at stake — the displeasure of the Countess Novera.

He had no sooner heard the request, and that it came from her, than he threw the weight of his influence into Margaret's scale. Mrs. Newbolt grew more exasperated; Margaret more patient and hopeful; and after the discussion of another quarter of an hour, the desired consent was extorted. Margaret could not make up her mind to leave the cottage; she felt her presence necessary as a protection to Rhoda; and sending a boy to Henningsley with a pencil note, saying that she had gained her point, and would wait till the arrival of the carriage, she once more resumed her station by the sick bed.

CHAPTER IV.

MARGARET did not return home till late in the afternoon, and it was not before she sat down to rest in her own room that she recollected they were to dine at Ashington. A family party had been invited; but she knew what that invitation meant, when the house was crowded with fashionable visitors; and, sorely against her inclination, she began to dress. Such an engagement could scarcely have fallen at a more inopportune moment. Far different thoughts from those of gaiety and society were in Margaret's mind. Features of suffering, a feeble voice, a glassy, sunken eye, were present to her, varied only by the pitying form and the soothing accents of the Countess Novera, and the fervent tones of Father Andrea's prayers, as he knelt to ask that the blessing of Heaven and the consolations provided by his Church might be granted to her who was so soon to depart this mortal life. Margaret had seen and heard all. She had assisted in the removal of poor Rhoda from her mother's cottage, and had been admitted into the room prepared for her at Henningsley. She was allowed to be useful, called upon for advice, in every way made one of the family, and even more; — a person of importance, whose aid was really needed. The flattery was too delicate to be resisted. Margaret's compassion for Rhoda was overpowered by her pleasure in being thus permitted to advance so many degrees in the Countess's

confidence. She neither wished for, nor would accept of thanks, and when at length they parted, it was with the promise that nothing, if possible, should prevent her from being at Henningsley again on the following day.

An evening at Ashington would harmonize ill with the scenes she had witnessed; and the society at Ashington would be as little likely to suit her taste, after the hours spent with the Countess; for Margaret's Church principles did not as yet succeed in rendering her always charitable in her judgments, or willing to make allowances for that which to her appeared wrong. Too often, they brought great trials to her faith. After working for months to bring her own mind into order, she was naturally more alive to any discordance of principles in others. She looked about for support, congeniality, unity; but they were nowhere to be found,—at least, by her. Of such things, indeed, she occasionally heard, and read; and she believed, that the rules which guided her, guided also many similarly circumstanced; but she was alone, as to intercourse, except with her uncle. He was to her the impersonation of the Church; and scarcely any one else seemed to belong to it. When she examined also the opinions which were spreading in different directions, they did not satisfy her. Some were too cautious, others too vague. There appeared to be a general awakening, a searching after truth, which mostly ended in the discovery of error. That this state of things must be the necessary result of a reaction after a long state of torpor, Margaret did not understand. She was impatient of imperfection, both in herself and her fellow-beings, and all Mr. Sutherland's advice and remonstrance failed in bringing her to submit humbly and patiently. He looked upon it as a judgment from

Heaven upon the sins of past and present generations; as a discipline for his own heart; a call for prayer and energy and self-denial. Margaret chafed and fretted; and whilst she carefully watched her own private conduct, still thought it no harm to complain of the defects of the Church at large, and, at times, of the negligence of private individuals. Mr. Sutherland now and then grew anxious about her; he saw that she was hasty in deciding upon public questions; and her expressions, however in general kept under control by the retiring unobtrusive character of her mind, were still, when made to him alone, exaggerated. And yet it was difficult to check her. The circumstances in which she was placed were very trying, and the defects and omissions of which she complained were true, and deeply to be deplored. He could himself look at them unshrinkingly, for his faith was strong, and his belief in the presence of God with His Church, was unwavering; but for a young girl just entering upon a new course of life, and above all things needing, or seeming to need, external support, such a confidence could scarcely be expected. The more clearly Margaret recognised the authority and beauty of the Church in theory, the more earnestly did she desire to see both exhibited in practice. Exert herself for the Church she did in her own limited sphere, by training the children, and whenever it was possible, suggesting right principles to the poor, and to the servants, or whoever might be placed within the range of her influence. But Margaret's mind could have taken a large grasp. She had talents, and energies, and powers of self-devotion which burned within her, and would fain have found their exercise in some great scheme of usefulness; and when the consciousness of what she might be, if only the oppor-

tunity were afforded her, aroused her imagination, she could find a reality to satisfy her only in the ideal which she had formed of the Romish Church. The events of the day, spent in the service, it might be called, of the Countess Novera, had given her an additional bias. The persons for whom, and with whom we work, and to whom we are enabled to give comfort, exercise over us a powerful influence. Margaret had a much greater sympathy with Romanists, after being united with them in an act of charity, than she would probably have had after weeks of ordinary acquaintance. They accorded with her tone of mind, more than any persons whom she had ever known, her uncle alone excepted. As to the gay world at Ashington, she thought of it with disgust. One hour passed with the Countess, she could almost have said one hour with Rhoda Newbolt, would be more precious to her than all the flattering attentions and cheerful amusements which might meet her elsewhere.

But Margaret was not destined to the trial of uncongenial dissipation on that evening. A duty of a different kind awaited her. She was sitting in her room expecting the carriage, when Baker came to deliver a message from Mrs. Percival:

"She wished to see Miss Margaret immediately."

Margaret concluded that it was to give some order about the children: but no — Mrs. Percival was reading a little twisted note, written in a trembling hand: "Miss Debrett has just sent over to me, Margaret, my dear, and really I don't know what to do. She says she is very unwell, poor thing! and wants to know if you can go to her: but it is impossible; we cannot disappoint Agatha."

"I hardly see why we should be so very particu-

lar," replied Margaret, whose pleasure, at the prospect of escaping an Ashington dinner party made her regard with complacency even a tête-à-tête with Miss Debrett.

"Certainly, it is only a family party," said Mrs. Percival; "but you are dressed, my dear,—it seems such a pity: and that new silk, just let me see how it sits."

Margaret threw off her shawl, and submitted to the inspection, which was pronounced to be satisfactory. The new dress-maker had fitted her remarkably well, and Mrs. Percival said to herself that Margaret was a very sweet-looking girl. To Agatha such praise would have been given aloud.

"But the dress does not signify, mamma," said Margaret. "I may have a great many better opportunities of wearing it; and I would much rather stay with Miss Debrett if she wants me."

"Why, my dear, want you, she assuredly does; she would not have written else. But there is nothing easier than to send an excuse. I don't know, indeed, how you can help it."

"Agatha cannot care," said Margaret; "it seems almost absurd to stand upon such ceremony with one's sister."

"It is not Agatha, my dear, but the Colonel. You know he always settles the numbers, and who shall go into dinner together; and if he is put out in these things it does not do."

"No," said Margaret, with unconscious emphasis, "that it certainly does not. But may I look at Miss Debrett's note?"

Mrs. Percival put it into her hand. It was very short, but written nervously and urgently, and Margaret saw that it would be unkind to refuse. She mentioned the possibility of some other person being a defaulter equally with herself, in which

case there would be no inconvenience to Colonel Clive; or, if this should not be, she thought, that by going early her mother might be able to pacify him before dinner was announced. Mrs. Percival gave permission at last, and Margaret went back to her room to take off her elegant dress, and prepare for spending the long summer evening with the weak, fanciful invalid.

And it was very long at first — longer than Margaret had often known such evenings. She found Miss Debrett in a high state of nervous excitement, grieving that she had sent for her, yet professing herself unequal to bear solitude. Margaret satisfied her that she had made no sacrifice in giving up Ashington; and after delivering the usual family bulletin, set herself to the task of diverting a sickly mind. The afternoon sun shone warm and bright into the little parlour, where, leaning back in a shabby, chintz-covered arm-chair, placed near the window, that she might see all that went by, through the half-opened blind, Miss Debrett entertained her companion, whom she stationed on a black horse-hair sofa near her, with the history of her maladies and her fears. Yet Margaret listened with more than patience; she was fulfilling a duty — doing some visible good; and she could find an interest in details related by almost any one. They gave her subjects for speculation at the time, and food for after-thought. Miss Debrett's life, though simple and uneventful, was always a mystery to her. Purposeless it appeared, and useless, except so far as her scanty means enabled her to relieve a few of the poor, yet, doubtless, holding some important place in the invisible scheme of Providence, which no other could occupy. Margaret did not then perceive the good which such persons effect, if it were only by their

claims upon others; or the consideration might have assisted in solving some difficulties as to the lingering lives even of individuals whose faculties are gone, and whose bodily frame seems already fitted for the grave.

"I am better now, my dear," said Miss Debrett, when Susan had placed the tea-things upon the table. "Having some one to talk to amuses me, and Susan is not much of a companion now she is so cast down about her sister."

"Rhoda is dying, I believe," replied Margaret; "but she will be much more comfortable in her illness than could have been expected. The Countess Novera has had her removed to Henningsley."

"Has she indeed? How very good of her! But then she is a Catholic, and so I suppose they seem all one."

"Yes," said Margaret, "and Father Andrea will be there to be a comfort to her."

"Father Andrea? that's the confessor, I suppose. Those Catholic priests are indefatigable. Susan told me the other day how it was that Rhoda came to turn, and it was all through one of them."

"Was it?" said Margaret, with increased interest.

"Yes, you know she was living at Eastlake before the new clergyman came, or St. James's church was built; and she never liked the Baptists, and after her first illness took a fancy to go to church; but when she had been there a few times she caught a cold, because there was no good place for her, and she was obliged to sit in a draught; and so, when one of the housemaids asked her to go to the Catholic chapel with her, she thought she might as well."

"And did that convert her?" asked Margaret.

"No, my dear, not that alone; but the priest saw there was a new face, and inquired about her;

and he made some of his people get acquainted with her; and at last he used to see her himself, when she went to drink tea with her Catholic friends, and he lent her books and tracts, and sometimes he used to frighten her, and tell her she never would go to heaven if she was not a Catholic; and so he brought her quite round."

Margaret sighed, and in her heart wondered what miracle would effect such a change in Mr. Stanley, as to induce him to exert himself equally in making a convert.

"I must say the Catholics talk very hardly," continued Miss Debrett; "that is one of the things I can't bear in them. To my mind, every one should have his own way of thinking."

"But some people think very wrongly," said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, so they do; but I don't mean of course that any one may think they may tell falsehoods, or commit murder; but I mean we may all have our own opinions."

Margaret was not inclined to answer, for Miss Debrett's reasonings, or rather attempts at reasoning, were of that slippery nature, it was hopeless to grasp them.

"I should not care half as much for all the dreadful things the Catholics believe," continued Miss Debrett, "if they did not want others to believe the same; but that is what I call uncharitable. They all do, though, and I dare say the Countess Novera thinks just as badly of you and me, Margaret, as if we were heathens."

"No, indeed," replied Margaret; but she did not say all that she wished, for there was something which restrained her from showing that she was in any way intimate at Henningsley.

"Then she is very unlike all her family," pursued

Miss Debrett. "They were always fixed to their faith, and would not hear of any one else being right; and they are a proud family, you know, my love; and that has helped to make them particular."

"I cannot discover what reason there is for calling them proud," replied Margaret. "I have never seen any thing but kindness in the Countess; and I am sure nothing could be more humble and gentle than her behaviour to poor Rhoda Newbolt."

"They are proud, my dear. I used to hear it said when I was a child; and I know that when the Countess was a little girl, just before they went to Italy, she made every one do exactly as she wished; and if they refused, she would stamp her little foot and look as grand as a queen. I don't mean to say any thing against her now," she added, observing Margaret's grave face; "I dare say she may be altered, and as you say, she has been extremely kind to the poor Catholic girl; but that may be, you know, because of her religion."

Margaret did not in general consider Miss Debrett uncharitable; but in the present case she was strongly disposed to believe her so. "What instances have they ever given of pride?" she inquired, "or is it only prejudice?"

"As to instances, my love, I can't remember: it is a long time since they left England. But every one says so; and you know the Viscountess that hangs over the dining-room was made up of it."

"What! the beautiful picture?" exclaimed Margaret eagerly. "I never heard who she was, or any thing about her."

"Very likely not, because there are few people living here still who care any thing for the family: but that picture is — I don't know how old exactly — two — three — yes, about three hundred years:

she was a De Lisle herself, which made me mention her, and she married her first cousin when she was quite young, not above seventeen."

"But about her pride," said Margaret, anxious to keep to the point.

"Why, my dear, it was Catholic pride; just that which has made them all Catholics since, as I heard Mr. Prior say the other day, when we were talking of them. She never would listen to any Protestant notions, and she seldom let a Protestant come within her gates. Her husband was a meek man, and rather set against her ways of going on; but she carried every thing before her. They had two children, a son, and a daughter just such as the Countess might be. By some means, I don't exactly know how, the daughter read some Protestant books, and the Bible, and the end of it was that she said she must turn Protestant."

Miss Debrett stopped, moved her chair, stroked her cat, rang for some more toast, and then remarked that the evenings were so long it was quite economical in candles.

"But about the Viscountess de Lisle?" inquired Margaret, fearing lest the thread of the discourse should be irrecoverably lost.

"Ah! my dear, you shall hear; but we will just wait one minute: I am so thirsty — feverish I suspect."

Margaret poured out the desired cup of tea, but still was obliged to wait. Anne would be in in another minute with the toast, and then Miss Debrett said she would go on. The toast came, and after insisting that Margaret ate nothing, and had lost her appetite, Miss Debrett was induced to continue. "What was I saying, my dear? — oh! just about Rachel de Lisle's turning, — so it was. Well, you know, I can't tell you what the Viscountess said

when she first heard about it, because no one was by, that I am aware of; but the story goes, that her daughter was shut up for three days in one of the old turrets, and that, when she came out, her mother bade her give up her Bible, and all her Protestant books, and solemnly vow that she would never look at them again."

"And she did not, of course?" said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, she did. The Viscountess was one of those persons whom no one dared to disobey, when she really began to order. The poor young girl was very timid, like her father, and though she had confessed every thing at first, when her spirit was up, yet after the three days in that dreadful turret — it is the one fronting the hills to the north — it was not likely that she should keep firm. So she gave up the Bible, and promised to go to confession, and do every thing just as before, and the Viscountess said she was satisfied. But that is not all, my dear," continued Miss Debrett, observing that Margaret was wishing to speak. "As was natural enough, after the promise was made, Rachel de Lisle grew so miserable that nothing was ever like it. Quite thin she was, like a skeleton, and so pale, there was not as much colour on her cheek as there is on mine, and that you will say is little enough. But the Viscountess never took any notice, though she must have known well what was the cause. She did not choose it to be supposed that one of the De Lisles could be wishing to turn Protestant, and I suppose she did not think there was any thing serious the matter. So the poor child grew worse and worse, and her mother would not have a doctor called in for fear he should find out the truth; and when the Viscount grew frightened about her, she said it was change of air that was wanted, and they took her away for a little while.

It would not do, however; and when they came back to Henningsley the case was worse than ever."

"But how strange," said Margaret, "that the father should not have interfered!"

"You don't know what that Viscountess de Lisle was like, my dear. I used to hear my grandmother talk of her. She just remembered having seen her when she was a very old woman, and she said her look would have governed an army. It was very wild and strange then, as you shall hear. Poor Miss de Lisle grew so ill at last, that no one could doubt she was dying. The Viscountess tried for many days not to believe it; but at last she was obliged to give in, and the doctor was sent for. And when he came, the first thing that the young creature did was to raise herself up in her bed, all weak and trembling as she was, and to say aloud, 'How sinful she had been; that she had never known a moment's happiness since she gave up her Bible; and the best she could do now was to own herself a Protestant, come what might.' They say, Margaret, that the Viscountess's look was dreadful to see. She fell down in a swoon; and when they took her up and recovered her, her senses were gone; whether from grief for having neglected her child so long, or from shame because of her change of religion, no one can tell."

"And her daughter?" said Margaret eagerly.

"She died that same night, and by her own request was placed in a corner of the family vault, apart from all her nearest relatives. The Viscountess recovered, as far as her strength went, and lived to a very old age; but she was never right in her mind; and all the remembrance that she seemed to have of what was gone by, was when she sat alone in her chamber wringing her hands, and repeating that the glory of the De Lisles was passed."

There was silence when this story was ended. Miss Debrett having been excited to unusual eloquence, sank back in her chair from fatigue, and Margaret leant her head upon her hand, and thought — not merely of the Viscountess de Lisle and her gentle daughter, but of the suffering girl who was then lying on her sick bed at Henningsley, and the harsh mother who had been the cause of her removal. The two histories were alike in some of their main facts; but on the one side there had been no compromise.

"You will own now that they are a proud race," said Miss Debrett, speaking in a languid voice.

"Pride does not seem to me quite the word," said Margaret; "it might have been a mistaken love of truth."

"You are too deep for me, my dear. Whether it was pride or not it was very cruel."

Margaret did not choose to enter upon the question; but, as the tea-things were removed, she again placed Miss Debrett's chair by the window, and amused her for some time with observations upon the persons who went by; and when the twilight was over, and candles were brought, she proposed reading aloud, as much for relief to herself as for the purpose of interesting her companion. Miss Debrett was soon lulled into a quiet sleep, and Margaret, resuming her work, sat wrapt in her own meditations, until the sound of the church clock at Staunton striking nine, and the arrival of the man-servant, gave notice that her moment of release was come.

"Good night, my love," said Miss Debrett, half waking up, and drowsily insisting that she should be well guarded from the cold.

"Not on this summer night, thank you," said Margaret, laughing.

"How stupid of me to be sure! I was just dreaming about ice; sliding upon it, I think."

"Ice to eat would be the best thing just now," said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, if I were but rich; but have a glass of wine instead."

Margaret declined all refreshment, and Miss Debrett, now quite awake, kissed her several times, expressed the utmost gratitude for her company, sent many excuses to Agatha, and called after her as she left the room, "You will not think too much of the story, my dear, and dream of Rachel de Lisle."

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CHAPTER V.

But Margaret did think, notwithstanding, and dream, in spite of the warning. In fancy, that night, whilst she slept, her mind wandered back to years which she had never known, and even her identity was in a manner changed. She was Margaret Percival still, yet the daughter of the haughty Viscountess de Lisle. Henningsley was her home, and a life of honour and enjoyment was opening before her. Then came confused visions of gaiety, and luxury; and suddenly, in the midst of all, she stood in a small turret chamber, with lines of green damp staining the walls, and scarcely a ray of light gleaming through the narrow window. A sense of hopelessness, desolation, and guilt was at her heart; but whilst she was yet unable to discover the cause, the scene changed to a spacious, gorgeously furnished hall, hung with tapestry, and bright with dazzling sunshine. Nobles and priests stood around a lofty throne, on which sat a stern, but noble-looking woman, whose glance awed into silence the retainers who awaited her bidding. Margaret gazed upon her in fear and admiration, and as she gazed, the features faded into indistinctness. It was the Countess Novera before whom she stood; and again, she also had vanished, and the lovely picture which had so rivetted her imagination was a breathing reality. Yet Margaret felt that she was in the presence of a commanding spirit, and the consciousness of her own infirmities humbled her

to the dust. No word was said; but in a pause of almost breathless expectation, there arose a strain of soft delicious music, which fell upon the ear as the harmony of a sinless world, and lingeringly floated through the vaulted chamber, till its silvery cadences died away in a scarcely audible sound. The lady arose; and Margaret knew the Vicountess de Lisle, and trembled lest she should speak. But once more there was a pause, and then the tones of music again broke upon the stillness; not soothing and gentle, but full and solemn; a chant in which a hundred voices were mingled in one fervent prayer. Margaret felt herself withdrawn as by a strong arm, and in a distant corner she stood to watch the procession of all who were present, as moving slowly and reverently they passed through the hall into a gallery beyond. Her eye followed them till they were blended in one confused mass, and then, led by a seemingly irresistible impulse, she rushed forward after them. She reached the extremity of the gallery. The crowd had gathered before a raised altar, over which hung a picture of the Virgin, with the infant Saviour in her arms. Every knee was bowed, and every head bent. Margaret thought she was alone amidst strangers. She turned, and Father Andrea was at her side. He pointed in silence to the kneeling multitude, and his eyes were raised to heaven. Margaret sought for the Viscountess de Lisle; but she was gone. Father Andrea took her hand, and there was an expression of command in his countenance as he signed to her to kneel likewise. Margaret's spirit was roused; but, as she would have withdrawn from him, a way seemed to open through the crowd, and the Countess Novera, radiant in beauty, came towards her. Father Andrea moved aside, and the Countess threw herself at her feet. Margaret saw

no more. A well-known voice in tones of anguish met her ear, and as she repeated her uncle's name, she awoke. The dream haunted her, and gave a peculiar direction to her thoughts when she recalled the conversation of the preceding evening. Under other circumstances Margaret might have been inclined to sympathize with the unhappy Rachel de Lisle, or, at least, to pity rather than condemn her; but the unperceived bias of her mind towards Romanism led her to view her conduct in another light. Two instances of what might be called persecution had lately been brought before her. Rhoda Newbolt, poor, comparatively ignorant, and uninstructed, had remained firm and unshaken, though tried by coarse abuse and unkindness; whilst, if Miss Debrett's story were true, the daughter of an English nobleman, when converted to the Protestant faith, had weakly yielded to fear, and denied the principles which in her heart she cherished. The consideration of the two cases suggested to Margaret the enquiry, whence did this difference arise? Was it from personal character, or from the distinctive nature of the two systems? Had the dream been a reality, where would have been her own strength? And now, in times of difficulty, what would be the inducements for her, or for any person to remain steadfast to the faith of the English Church? If men were called upon to die for it, would they be likely to stand the test? Whilst striving to answer these questions satisfactorily, Margaret's thoughts reverted to the authority and grandeur of the Church of Rome; and forgetting the constancy of those who in other days had been martyrs for the reformation of religion, she drew a contrast unfavourable to the English Church, and discouraging to her own mind.

Margaret indeed knew nothing of Romanism in

reality ; whilst of the Church of England she knew the defects, from what she saw ; the excellencies, principally from her own imperfect practice. Had she been aware of her own state, the very doubts which presented themselves might have proved to her that she was unsettled and in peril, and in no condition to entertain such questions. But she seemed only to be indulging her fancy ; forming innocent comparisons ; whilst she was in truth fostering an irreverent and undutiful tone of mind, and deciding in ignorance upon matters beyond her.

Days fraught with the most important consequences open and often pass, and close, with little to mark them as different from others. Margaret sat down to breakfast with her parents, and heard particulars of the Ashington party ; how Agatha looked ; who sat at her right hand ; and what there was for dinner ; and especially, how angry Colonel Clive was at her absence, since it made the numbers uneven.

" I tried to pacify him, my dear," said Mrs. Percival ; " but he declared that persons ought to know their own minds ; that engagements should never be broken, and a good deal more of the same kind ; but you must make friends with him when you meet."

Margaret was rather indifferent upon the subject, for her attention was occupied with other things. She was planning a request for a second visit to Henningsley, whilst uncertain how to word it so as to obtain her mother's permission. Breakfast was nearly over, and the post-bag was brought as usual. Margaret saw her uncle's handwriting, and expecting that he would fix a day for being with them, took up the letter as soon as she could. A little note was lying beside it, which was not in the bag, but had been brought up with it. The direction

shewed that it was from the Countess Novera. Both seemed to have equal claims; but Margaret opened her uncle's letter first, that her mother's curiosity might be satisfied. The contents did not answer her anticipation.

"Oh! Mamma, only think; my uncle is going away."

"What? where?" exclaimed Dr. Percival, turning round suddenly.

"Only for three months, papa."

"Pshaw! nonsense, child. How you frighten one!" and Dr. Percival resumed his newspaper.

"Let me hear, Margaret," said Mrs. Percival, with greater composure.

"It is quite unexpected," answered Margaret; "he says, 'You will be surprised, and—I am selfish enough to hope—sorry, to learn that this must be a leave-taking instead of a promissory note, for we shall probably not meet for some weeks, or months perhaps more correctly. My friend Morland has just lost his wife, and is extremely unwell, though more in mind than in body. Change of air and scene the physicians say he must have, and you know he is not so overburdened with this world's goods as to be able to go wherever he chooses, and provide a curate besides for his little parish. I have written to offer him an exchange for three months, and am going myself to the bishop, to gain his sanction, which there is no doubt of having, as Morland is one of his great favourites.

"'Should this be, as most probably it will, I shall not delay an hour longer than is necessary, and cannot see the least probability of having a day to bestow upon the Grove. Three months, however, will quickly pass, and you must comfort me in the mean time by writing constantly. The change I

hope may be beneficial to myself, as I have not been well for some weeks.' "

" So like one of Henry's quixotic plans!" said Mrs. Percival, when Margaret had finished reading.

" And so unsatisfactory!" observed Margaret: " ' Not been well for some weeks!' I wonder what that means; he never said anything about it before."

" It is very clear what it means," observed Dr. Percival — " that he has been overworking himself. I prophesied he would do so long ago."

" I wish he could have come over, though only for one day," said Margaret. " It would be a relief to know what is really the matter with him."

" Why I tell you, my dear, that he has been overworking himself; what can you want more?"

Margaret thought that overworking was a very vague term, including all shades of disease, from a trifling affection of the throat, to the last stage of consumption; and her mind vibrated between the two extremes, inclining rather to the latter. Mrs. Percival took up the letter to read it again, and Margaret, disappointed and uneasy, opened the note from Henningsley. To her surprise it contained another also for her mother, the purport of which she soon understood. The Countess confessed that she was solitary and out of spirits. Neither Father Andrea nor Lucia could entirely enter into her feelings since she had consented to receive poor Rhoda into her house, with the knowledge that her life could not, except by a miracle, be prolonged beyond a few days. " I have done what was right," she said, " and so far I am satisfied; but my anxiety is great, and though I know that, humanly speaking, Rhoda cannot recover, still I feel that the responsibility of her illness now lies upon me. Father Andrea, as a man, has little to

do with a sick room, except in his spiritual capacity; Lucia is too young to be of assistance to me; my servants are mostly foreigners; and I could not bring myself to leave her to the sole care of a hired nurse. In this state of affairs is it selfish to ask if you can assist me? With you, I should know that I had sympathy and support; and you would be able to say and do many things in regard to the poor girl's family, which I could not. I almost dread meeting the mother, she so hates my religion; and, I hear, is never moderate in her language of condemnation. To you, a Protestant, she could say nothing. I have written to ask Mrs. Percival that you may be spared to me for a few days; but if you have any reason for declining, destroy the note, and do not think for an instant that your refusal can in any way affect my sincere regard, and, I may add with truth — gratitude, for what you have already done for a member of our Holy Church."

Poor Margaret! the net was closing around her, and she was rejoicing in the snare. When she had finished reading the note, the thought crossed her mind that her uncle's absence might turn out to her advantage. She did not quite think he would approve of her going to Henningsley; but she satisfied herself that his disapprobation would be unfounded. At any rate, it was too late now to inquire into his reasons for considering it inexpedient to form an intimacy with a Romanist. Margaret might have learnt a lesson of prudence, and distrust of herself, from the firmness with which this single observation, the only one which Mr. Sutherland had ever made upon the subject, had implanted itself in her memory. At each succeeding step that brought her nearer to the point from which it was intended to warn her, it had recurred to her afresh. But at every remembrance, Margaret had turned

aside with the thought, "This is not the moment to draw back." Now, when the object of her wishes was so nearly attained, that friendship which had never been entirely absent from her thoughts since, twelve months before, she had first seen the Countess Novera, she had scarcely the power, and certainly not the will to pause and reflect upon what might possibly be the result. The way appeared to have been smoothed before her, and so it has been with many. Is it that the Providence of God places us in situations of trial, which we have no strength to resist? Or is it rather that religious faith is a subject of such awful, overwhelming importance, that when we tamper with it lightly, and dally with that which we have been warned against by our lawful guides, as error, the offence is allowed to bring its own punishment, and they who have courted the first temptation are permitted to wander within reach of a second? Yet Margaret yielded her imagination to the attractions of Romanism, and sought to cultivate an intercourse with those who professed it, and had little or no suspicion that she was acting wrongly.

Mrs. Percival's permission for the visit to Henningsley was gained without much difficulty. The question of the children was indeed a serious one; but the Countess's note was so flattering, that it seemed desirable to make any sacrifice in order to secure such a friendship; and it was agreed that Mrs. Percival should be the governess herself during Margaret's absence.

"You will take care not to stay longer than you can help, my dear," she said, as Margaret was leaving the room to write her answer of acceptance. "We shall want you back again, sadly. Don't mention any particular time, and then you can come home at a moment's notice. And, Margaret

—wait one minute—I must speak to Baker; I should like to know what dresses you will take."

At nineteen Margaret could little endure such an interference with her wardrobe. There was an expression about the mouth which betokened displeasure; but it soon disappeared. "I shall not want many, mamma. The Countess will not, of course, have any company."

"No, no, I forgot; but still I should like you to have enough: and there may be visitors unexpectedly."

Baker was sent for, and Margaret found that her services would not be much required in her own packing. Mrs. Percival preferred inspection to teaching, and Margaret was told, as a matter of favour, that if she would go to the school-room, her mother would undertake to arrange what it would be necessary for her to carry with her.

"Are you really going away, Margaret?" asked Harriet, when her sister appeared, and occupied her usual place at the table. "Symonds said you were."

"We shall not know about our lessons if you do," said Grace.

"I don't like you to go," exclaimed Philip; and he came up to her, and climbing upon the back of her chair, kissed her cheek, whilst roughly disordering her hair.

"I shall not begin Italian, now," continued Harriet, "for another whole week. Oh! Margaret, I wish you would stay at home. Nothing will do well when you are away."

Margaret was pleased at the lamentations over her departure. They made her hope that her efforts to be gentle and impartial had been of service; and she perceived that the order which she had introduced into her own life by acting upon rule, had

not been without effect upon the children. Certainly in comparing the present state of the schoolroom with that of twelvemonths previous, the change seemed wonderful. It was not that observances of times and seasons had in themselves produced any magical effect, but they had introduced the principle of regularity; and having been undertaken upon right grounds, had given a tone to Margaret's own mind which had insensibly acted upon her pupils. Children, however inclined to be thoughtless and disorderly, always prefer method in their teachers; and Margaret had gained the hearts of all, as much by a greater attention to system, as by an increase of consideration and patience. The danger now lay in the contrary extreme. Mr. Sutherland's hints upon the inexpediency of giving too minute rules for daily life—putting the mind in a go-cart, however applicable to the subject for which they were at first introduced, did not strike Margaret as having any thing to do with education; and finding that a few stringent laws had been beneficial, she fell into the natural error of supposing that many would be more so. In the prospect of a week's absence, she thought it might be advisable to express her wishes very distinctly; and accordingly, a list of commands and warnings was made out for each, which entered even into the play hours, and left but little room for freedom of choice or action. The actual hearing the lessons she knew might be easily left to her mother; but there were many little trifles which Margaret was accustomed to watch particularly when at home, and which she did not like to have neglected whilst she was away. Harriet was told to put away her walking-dress and bonnet in a certain order, that nothing might be mislaid; her lessons were directed to be learnt

in rotation, taking the most difficult first, without any regard to the particular inclination of the moment; she was restricted in her amusements out of school hours, not simply by being forbidden to read books which were beyond her age, but by being obliged to read those which were considered most instructive; besides many other minor injunctions in which Grace and Philip were included. This tutelage had been very bearable whilst Margaret was at hand to suggest, and not to command; and she did not see, neither did the children imagine, that it would be different when converted into a law. The point to be gained in Margaret's mind was the adherence to good habits; but the real point, which is the aim of all wise education, either of men or of children, lies far beyond. Human beings must be governed and directed with a view to their being in time able to govern themselves; and neither implicit obedience to a spiritual guide in man or woman, nor a mechanical routine in a child, can take the place of that voluntary subjection to the law of truth and holiness which is our only happiness. Margaret, however, only thought of keeping the children in good order, whilst she was at Henningsley; and having settled every thing she believed necessary, returned to her mother. She was longing now to set off for her walk, dreading lest something unforeseen should occur to stop her. A remembrance of her uncle now and then came across her, and it was strangely unwelcome; but Margaret was busy, and in a hurry; and there was no time to enter into an examination of conscience.

"I begged the Countess not to send the carriage for me, mamma," she said, as the luncheon-bell rang, and she was called down stairs. "I knew I should enjoy the walk, and Symonds can have my

few things carried to Henningsley in the course of the afternoon; the distance is really nothing."

"As you like, my dear. I shall probably take the children out myself. I have some thoughts of driving to Ashington, and Agatha will be glad to see them."

"And make my peace with Colonel Clive, mamma, if you can," said Margaret, laughing.

Mrs. Percival laughed also, and was afraid it would be a task of difficulty.

CHAPTER VI.

On the same afternoon Mrs. St. Aubyn's drawing-room was crowded with visitors, and amongst them appeared Agatha, Colonel Clive, and Lucia Fontana. Lucia seemed to be domesticated in the house. She wore a morning-dress, and her long, dark, glossy hair was plaited round her head, so as to display its symmetry of form to great advantage. Her eyes were full of lustre, her mouth was smiling, and her manner animated. She was in all respects, except in the outline of her features, unlike the retiring, melancholy foreigner, whom the world had pitied when it had first beheld her at Henningsley. Mrs. St. Aubyn addressed her frequently, and brought her into notice by a tone of intimacy, at which Agatha bit her lip, in the endeavour to conceal a scornful smile. Colonel Clive lounged upon a sofa, and looked moody; and his tone, even when he made the most indifferent speeches, was indicative of much hidden annoyance. Lucia watched him carefully, whilst she seemed to give attention to the light topics of conversation; for she was observant of every one connected with the Percivals. Agatha moved with the intention of going some time before the other visitors, but as often Colonel Clive did not perceive it: and at length, as if impatient, she coldly shook hands with Mrs. St. Aubyn, and saying that she believed the Colonel had business in the town, went away.

Her departure was the signal for others; one by

one, each made the proper civilities, and in a few minutes the room was nearly empty, Colonel Clive and Lucia only remaining. The Colonel looked round for his wife.

"Where is Agatha? — gone!"

"Gone," replied Mrs. St. Aubyn; "she seldom pays long visits."

"I meant her to go with me to several places, — I thought she understood it," continued the Colonel; "but she always escapes me."

He walked angrily to the window.

"I think I heard Mrs. Clive say, that she expected her mother to call, and that she wished to be in time to see her," said Lucia, in a low voice to Mrs. St. Aubyn.

The remark was repeated to the Colonel, who exclaimed: —

"That makes no difference. Why did she come out if she did not intend to stay? A mother, indeed!" he muttered to himself; "what business have married women with relations?"

"None at all," observed Mrs. St. Aubyn. "When I married, I gave up all my home connections at once. I thought it quite right; and young people in these days should do the same."

Colonel Clive was not mollified by this speech, though Mrs. St. Aubyn had made it without any intention of adding fuel to the already kindled flame.

"I shall let Agatha know what I think about it," he began in a grave, rather pompous tone, and then, in a louder key, and, regardless of the presence of Lucia, whom he believed, notwithstanding her many months' residence in England, to be incapable of understanding any thing he said, he broke forth in a full tide of complaints, of which one, and not the least, was Margaret's change of engagement

on the preceding day. "The appearance of the dinner was spoilt," he said—"entirely spoilt. Three gentlemen together, and Captain Tracy walked into the dining-room alone! Such blunders never were known at Ashington before, and they shall not be again. The next time Margaret is asked to my house it shall be when we are entirely by ourselves."

"Margaret is thoughtless in such cases, I must own," said Mrs. St. Aubyn; "she reads a great deal too much, and her mother shuts her up in the school-room till she really is scarcely fitted for society. I tell Mrs. Percival often, that it is a very bad place for her; but she says to me that it can not.

Colonel Clive interrupted the repetition of a long conversation, which he knew was coming, by a continuation of his own grievances. "Mrs. Percival manages as badly as possible. You used to say she understood how to do things, and that she would set Agatha right; but Agatha is perfectly obstinate, and her mother does nothing. My parties are failures; the dinner yesterday was one. Three gentlemen together, and Captain Tracy walking into the room alone! —It was too bad! — To change her mind at the last minute!"

Who the "her" meant was not clear from the sentence preceding; but Colonel Clive, like many irritable persons, had a faculty for confounding faults and persons. "If it was not you, it was your grandmother," was his motto, as well as that of the wolf in the fable, whenever his temper was aroused.

Mrs. St. Aubyn allowed him to go on, knowing that it was in vain to interrupt; but though she entirely sympathized with his annoyance, she would have preferred that it should not be exhibited before another person.

Lucia took up a book, though without any intention of reading. For some minutes the conversation continued in the same strain in which it had begun, betraying to Lucia's ear many of the secret cares of the Ashington household, and inducing her to form, not unwillingly, a very unfavourable opinion of Agatha and her family.

Mrs. St. Aubyn at length grew uncomfortable, and endeavoured to interpose some observations, which might divert her brother's wrath. She did not much care, whilst he spoke only of such trifles as Margaret's absence from the dinner table; and she could with difficulty resist adding a few personal attacks upon Agatha, whom she was beginning cordially to dislike; but when the Colonel proceeded to more minute details as to the defective management of his household, and hinted, in rather plain terms, that if he had known the Percivals as well before marriage as he did then, he never would have connected himself with them. Mrs. St. Aubyn became very anxious to stop him. The quick eyes of the young Italian she saw were raised every now and then from her book, and it was a great mistake in Colonel Clive to imagine that she did not understand him. After eight months' residence in England, and a constant study of the language, Lucia was fully capable both of comprehending and speaking it; and Mrs. St. Aubyn knowing this, sincerely wished her at Henningsley.

Colonel Clive ceased at length, and went away, saying he should go to the news-room in Staunton. Mrs. St. Aubyn was doubtful what next should be done; she was a woman of ordinary judgment, and often kept right merely from her knowledge of the ways of the world, in which she had so long moved; and when Lucia shut her book, as if expecting her to enter into conversation, for want of

some other subject, she remarked, by way of apology, that her brother had a good many things to vex him; married persons generally had. Lucia agreed; but thought that Colonel Clive had been married too short a time to have had an opportunity of knowing care.

"That is your ignorance of our English ways, my dear. Married people in this country are thrown very much together, and they soon find out whether they suit. I don't mean, of course, to say any thing against Mrs. Clive; but naturally she likes society, and my brother is getting on in life; he is beginning to think of quiet."

"There must be a very considerable disparity between them," observed Lucia.

"Yes, more exactly than there ought to have been; but one sees things so differently at different times, and Agatha always appeared extremely fond of him."

"Which means that she is not fond of him now," thought Lucia.

"It certainly was a very fortunate thing for her," continued Mrs. St. Aubyn. "There is a large family of the Percivals, and they can not all expect to marry so well."

"How many children are there?" inquired Lucia.

"Eight, altogether: three sons and five daughters. The eldest son is in the army."

"I think I have seen him," observed Lucia.

"Very possibly. He is a fine young man; extravagant and thoughtless, as all young men are; but people make a great deal of him, wherever he goes."

And here Mrs. St. Aubyn stopped, believing that she had rather neutralized, by her moderation, the effect of her brother's anger. But Lucia was not

to be deceived. She had been prejudiced against the Percivals before: she was more so now; and the thought that Margaret was on that very day to become an inmate of Henningsley was hateful to her. Mrs. St. Aubyn, upon consideration, felt that she had gone rather far in her confidence; but she satisfied herself by adding — "I say these little things to you, my dear, but I should not do so to every one. Of course you will not think of repeating them."

Lucia smiled, and said, "Assuredly not;" and from that moment felt that she had acquired a firmer hold upon Mrs. St. Aubyn's favour. The acquaintance was now even of more consequence to her than it had been the year before. She had imbibed a taste for society during her stay in Devonshire, and, though equally jealous, was less satisfied with the Countess as a solitary companion. Mrs. St. Aubyn's house was the resort of the first and gayest families in the neighbourhood, and there was a hope that it would be open to her at all times. The renewal of the acquaintance had certainly been very flattering. Mrs. St. Aubyn called at Henningsley the very day after her arrival, and evinced great pleasure at the meeting. She pressed for an early visit; and, upon learning the state of the household, and the preparations which were making to receive poor Rhoda, mentioned that if Lucia's assistance and companionship were not necessary for the Countess, or if her spirits were at all oppressed by the sight of such serious illness, it would charm her to see her at any moment she might wish for a change. The invitation was repeated to the Countess, and it was no sooner understood that Margaret would spend a few days at Henningsley than Lucia was sent to Mrs. St. Aubyn. In the dismantled state of the house, the accommodation was great, for

Rhoda occupied the only spare room which had as yet been properly fitted up; and the Countess secretly rejoiced that so good an excuse was afforded for enjoying Margaret's society alone. Lucia heard that she was to go with mingled feelings of satisfaction and jealousy. Mrs. St. Aubyn's house was very different from Henningsley, and much more suited to her new tastes; but the idea of Margaret's occupying her apartment, her place, her position as the Countess's friend, was intolerable. Beatrice carefully strove to calm the feelings which she perceived had been excited. She spoke of Margaret with indifference personally; but said that it was desirable, under the circumstances, to have an English person with her whom Rhoda knew.

"If only in charity, something of the kind ought to be arranged," she said, "or the poor girl would feel that she was dying amongst strangers."

To this Lucia was compelled to agree; and at last, softened by the Countess's manner, and the promise that she would send a note every day, and that Father Andrea would not fail to visit her, she departed happily. Father Andrea was not so well pleased as the Countess. He saw that it was an unavoidable necessity; but he did not like to give up his charge, even for the short time that this would probably be. The Countess, however, was urgent, for many reasons. Unknowingly, her own inclinations strongly influenced her; and Father Andrea yielded with the better grace, as he knew that Mrs. St. Aubyn was not likely to interfere upon the subject of religion; nor was Lucia in danger of seeing or hearing any thing whilst with her, which would at all lead her to imagine that the Protestant faith could in any way be superior to the Romish.

CHAPTER VII.

Several days went by, and Margaret was still an inmate of Henningsley without any immediate prospect of a change. They were days of intense excitement and interest, mingled with many hours of solemn, awful thought.

In a distant chamber, worn with suffering, and sinking rapidly, lay the wasted form of Rhoda Newbolt, her spirit hovering, as it were, between earth and heaven; sometimes bowed down by the weariness, the anguish of disease; sometimes piercing into the unknown future, and shrinking with fear from the possible torment which might await her; and then, resting with unhesitating confidence upon her membership with the true Church, the pardon which she believed was sealed for her in heaven, and the trust that whatever might be deficient in herself would be supplied by the offices of the Church. Margaret did not know the whole of this. Father Andrea was watchful over her even more than over Rhoda. The one he considered to be safe, the other was yet in peril. The personal wants of the sick girl were supplied by a careful nurse, and Margaret was only admitted to the chamber when any of her relations visited her, to whom her presence was more satisfactory than that of the Countess; or at those seasons, when prayer and spiritual advice had calmed and elevated the sufferer's mind. Rhoda could then speak of comfort, and hope; of more than hope — assurance of final salvation; and whilst she blessed Margaret for her

kindness, and prayed that her path through life might be happier than her own, she would often raise her feeble voice in prayer, that in one respect she might be even like herself,—in the knowledge and reception of the true faith. From the chamber of sickness and approaching death, Margaret went to the Countess Novera. There were the same desires, though unexpressed: she could not doubt it. The Countess's thoughtfulness, almost compassion when her religion was alluded to,—the tone in which she spoke of Rhoda's conversion,—the expressed hope that it might be granted to her before her death to see all whom she loved in a similar frame of mind, betokened to Margaret the wishes which Beatrice had never yet named. Margaret said to herself that such anxiety was in accordance with Romish principle; and having no idea of danger, she indulged in the luxury of believing that she had at length gained the Countess's affection. The heart which sorrow had closed against human love seemed expanding again for her. There was indeed no actual certainty. Beatrice had not in words gone beyond the terms of regard and esteem; but her face brightened when Margaret entered; her footstep lingered in the room where Margaret was seated; the merest intimation of a wish was acted upon; and if Margaret in return ventured to imply something of that which was passing in her own breast, Beatrice dwelt upon the subject, and eagerly yet delicately sought to gain a still deeper insight into her heart, as if there was centred the one chief object of her interest. The Countess was indeed more influenced by her pleasure in Margaret's society than she had at all imagined probable, when she first invited her to Henningsley. Religion was mingled with her increasing affection; for the prospect of conversion, which seemed doubtful at a distance,

was beheld with a sanguine eye, as Beatrice grew more acquainted with the secrets of Margaret's mind. And her perception was aided by Father Andrea. He could watch the fulfilment of his prophecy as Margaret bowed beneath the spell of the Countess's commanding disposition, when exhibited to others, and her winning gentleness to herself. He saw the power which beauty in poetry, or art, or nature, exercised over her, and he taught the Countess to profit by his long experience, and to display the attractive character of her religion, so as insensibly to associate it with all that was most noble and refined in feeling or action. And for himself there was another task. He could speak of the village and the poor; he could lament the ignorance of the children, the obtuseness and hard-heartedness of the parents, and remark, as if making a careless observation, that he had found it the same in other places. He could point to the dissensions within the Church, and when reading the public papers, comment upon the interference of the State in ecclesiastical affairs, and suggest that when such a condition of things was allowed to exist, Erastianism must of necessity be the foundation on which the English Church was really built, whatever might be its theory of independence. Margaret had never studied Church history, either ancient or modern, and could not therefore bring facts to answer in the Romish Church. She knew nothing of the condition of the peasantry in Italy, in the immediate vicinity of the Roman see; she did not believe the assertions which were made regarding the superstition and degradation of the greater part of the population of Ireland; she had never read the annals of the early ages of Christianity, and could not therefore repel the charge of Erastianism by pointing to the time when

the power of the emperors was paramount over the Church ; or cast it back upon the very origin of the Papal system, by showing, that after Gregory the Great in opposition to the Patriarch of Constantinople had denounced as "the forerunner of Antichrist" any bishop who should arrogate to himself the title of "Universal," a successor, Boniface the Third, consented to receive the same dignity from Phocas, usurper though he was, and stained with the guilt of murder. Of these facts, and many others which are to be met with in the annals of history, and are recorded by Romanists themselves, Margaret was ignorant. Church history had formed but a very small part of her education. Because the Papal power was strongly asserted, and had been exercised for many centuries, — though never without finding some one to raise a voice against it,— therefore she imagined it must stand upon a firm foundation, and she was inclined to believe that England had committed an act of schism, by cutting herself off voluntarily from Rome, in compliance with the will of a wicked monarch ; and that the only justification of such an act was to be found in that accusation of erroneous doctrine, which after an intercourse with the Countess and her confessor appeared, very possibly, unfounded. Father Andrea saw that he was progressing, and to an extent which rather surprised him. Though he had early discovered Margaret's unsettled indefinite Church principles, he had yet prepared himself for a more powerful defence upon controverted points than she was able to make ; for having been himself early fortified against the assaults of what his Church deems heresy, and instructed in the points upon which Rome, whether fairly or unfairly, is accustomed to rest her claims, he did not expect to find, what is actually the case in many instances, though it was only partially so in

Margaret's, that the children of the English Church have been allowed to grow up in the midst of dissent, both Romish and Sectarian, without being provided with any sound argument for their support, and without fully knowing that the Church to which they belong is descended by direct and well proved succession from the first Apostles of Christianity. The few, but pointed observations of Father Andrea, were however less dangerous to Margaret's safety than the more enticing intercourse with the Countess. She was a little on her guard against the one, and her spirit was sometimes roused to reason away a charge against the Church, or to doubt the assertions which were made as to the overweening power of the State; but with Beatrice she could do nothing except listen and love. After an attendance upon poor Rhoda she would sometimes wander into the garden for refreshment, and there being almost immediately joined by the Countess, who seemed to know her movements by instinct, they would spend hours under the shade of the trees, or pacing the terrace slowly, or resting upon the stone balustrade overlooking the lovely landscape, whilst time fled by unheeded, as the Countess related in simple but beautiful language the history of her early days, or drew from Margaret the secret trials of her own, or touching upon some grave subject, shed the charm of romance over the disputed doctrines of her Church, and painted the blessedness of the invisible beings whom she addressed, the sense of security in their protection, the hallowed purity and superhuman beauty of the Virgin Mother of our Lord, or the unutterable comfort afforded in hours of desolation by the privilege of interceding for the dead.

"You have never lost a friend, you say," ob-

served Beatrice, at the close of one of these conversations: "then you cannot enter into the subject heartily. When such an affliction shall befall you, you will think upon my words."

"I shall scarcely need that to remind me of them," said Margaret. "Rhoda Newbolt's case has made me consider the point."

"Poor Rhoda! yes, she dwells with deep satisfaction upon Father Andrea's promise."

The thought crossed Margaret's mind —"Father Andrea may die likewise;" but she merely said, that the idea was beautiful, though she could not remember any passage in the Bible which sanctioned the belief that the condition of any individual could be altered after death.

"The belief suits you," said the Countess with a sweet smile; "you will not quarrel with me now, for saying that the turn of your mind is more towards Catholicism than Protestantism. Witness your admiration of all which I admire, and yet I am a rigid Catholic.

"Not rigid," replied Margaret, "or you could not bear with me."

"Yes, rigid indeed, if you knew me well. It is an inheritance derived from many generations. I could tell you a tale: — you remember the picture which you yesterday said had enabled you to recognise me at Rouen?"

"The Viscountess de Lisle," replied Margaret, "and —"

"The gentle Rachel, as she has been always termed; I see you know the story. Can you doubt now that we are rigid?"

"There might have been more of principle than of cruelty in the Viscountess," said Margaret.

An expression of pleasure, and something of enthusiasm lit up the Countess's face.

"We will go and look at my ancestors," she said, quickening her step. "I can talk to you better, make you more able to understand my feeling towards her, when in her presence."

They entered the dining-room and the Countess, standing opposite to the picture, regarded it intently for some little time in silence. Margaret's eye wandered from the childish beauty of the painting to the maturer, but more perfect loveliness of the graceful Countess, and could with difficulty trace the resemblance she had imagined so striking. Sorrow and care had left their indelible mark upon the pale cheek, which had so early in life been wet with the tears of widowhood; and the bright pink spot forming a brilliant contrast to its clear white, was the sign of a constitution that would have sunk under but a small portion of the trials which had in after years shaken the reason, yet left undiminished the strength of the youthful Viscountess.

"I have looked at her often," exclaimed Beatrice, at length, without removing her eyes from the picture, "and tried to form a proper estimate of her character. As a child, she excited my awe and wonder, long before I understood that I might admire her. There seemed such a strange inconsistency between her infantine, joyous features, and the long life of suffering.

"But surely," replied Margaret, "though you may pity and excuse, you can scarcely think she was justified."

"Nay, you have heard the Protestant version, I perceive," said the Countess, interrupting her. "Eleanor de Lisle was not a person to require justification."

"Yet you say she was rigid," observed Margaret.

"Rigid as I would be rigid myself; firm in the

cause of truth, even as I trust I might be, if I were called upon to sacrifice myself for it."

"And was there no excuse for her daughter?" asked Margaret.

"Rachel was a gentle, timid creature," replied the Countess, "weak in intellect and will. She was not worthy to be the child of such a mother; one who could at the same time rule for the Church and die for it."

"But the facts of the story are true?" said Margaret.

"True, perhaps, in their main outline. You have heard, doubtless, of the north turret. Rachel was shut up there; but it was not then, as it is now, weather stained and damp. It was provided with every comfort which the habits of the age required, and during her three days' imprisonment, Rachel had food and attendance for the body, and books for the mind, which were to convert her from her errors, together with the visits of her confessor; whilst her mother passed the days and nights in prayer, and fasting, and watching, in the hope that the salvation of her daughter might be accorded to her intercessions."

Margaret's glance was turned to the painting, and the features which before seemed imbued with the taint of severity, assumed a softer aspect.

"But the illness," she said, "was assuredly, much neglected."

"The Protestant version again!" repeated the Countess, lightly; and then she added with greater earnestness—"It is hard upon us, that even the histories of our own families cannot go forth to the world unaltered. Rachel was seriously ill only for a few weeks: drooping she had been much longer; but it was not easy then, as it is now, to procure safe medical advice; and her mother, who had long

been skilled in such practice, administered to her wants herself."

"But not to her mind," said Margaret; "yet might she not have known that the fault lay there rather than in the body."

"How could she suppose such a case?" returned the Countess, with sudden energy. "How could the wife of a De Lisle, descended herself from the same stock, suppose that her daughter could be guilty of such weakness and deception as to profess a religion which she did not believe; or own herself converted, merely because she was weary of a three days' solitude? No, upon that point, I can fully exculpate her."

"The story, as I heard it," replied Margaret, "said, that the Viscountess did know the state of her daughter's mind, but that she was wilfully blind to her illness."

Beatrice turned quickly, and whilst a proud blush overspread her cheek, she said in a tone of blended seriousness and affection—"Promise me that you will try and not be prejudiced by these false tales. I have heard that I am the inheritor, not merely of the features of Eleanor de Lisle, but of her character also, and I could little bear that you should condemn me."

"Condemn you!" repeated Margaret. "No, who could do that?"

"You could," replied the Countess, "and must, if you have truly imbibed the Protestant creed. But think," she continued, and her manner assumed an unconscious elevation—"think of one whose faith had been the patrimony of her family for centuries; who could reckon prelates and cardinals amongst her race; one who could carry back her lineage even beyond the date of the Norman conqueror, and who had never known one example of faltering al-

legiance to our holy Church; what must have been her feelings at the first prospect of a blot upon the family honour, at the discovery of a traitor to the cause of truth amongst her own children?" The Countess paused, and added: "that was the case of Eleanor de Lisle. My spiritual inheritance would have been like hers, but for the fall of the unhappy Rachel."

"Then there have never been converts to Protestantism from amongst you?" said Margaret.

"Never, in the direct line. Collateral branches have wandered off, as they mixed with other families; but it is our boast that, with that one sad exception, neither the sons nor daughters of the Viscounts de Lisle have ever proved apostate. I am the last;"—the Countess clasped her hands fervently;—"God grant that the faith I have received may be carried with me untainted to my grave!"

Margaret could not reply. She was searching in her own heart for an attachment as strong to the Church of her fathers.

"You cannot feel with me?" said the Countess, doubtfully.

"Yes," replied Margaret, "I can feel; that is, if I were in your place, I should do so; but—"

"Ah! you are a Protestant; if you were not"—Beatrice hesitated, and concluded, as if the words had escaped against her will,—"there would be but few blessings greater than to know that in all things we could think alike."

She left the room, but Margaret remained behind. A tumult of conflicting emotions had been raised by the conversation. The Countess's affection was showing itself each day more evidently, and Margaret was happy. But separation was becoming less bearable in consequence. Alike in all things!

Beatrice could not desire it more ardently than she did. Yet on which side lay the right? Margaret's eye was again attracted to the picture, and when she looked at it, the dream which had associated it with herself came to her remembrance. As she had felt before in imagination, so she felt now in reality. The strength to govern seemed the undoubted patrimony of Rome. The bright deep searching eye of the Viscountess de Lisle appeared to rest upon her reproachfully, and when Margaret sought in her own heart for the strength which was to resist the appeal, she could find none. The spirit of criticism and discontent had undermined, unknown to herself, the spirit of loyalty and reverence.

Margaret's slumbers on the following night were broken by the voice of the Countess's Italian maid. Lauretta was standing by her bed-side, pale and frightened, and holding a night-lamp in her hand.

"The Countess," she said, "was wishing to see Miss Percival immediately."

Margaret started up, and hastily enquired the hour. Lauretta did not know. She had been summoned by her mistress's bell, for the English girl was dying. Margaret's heart stopped beating. Even when in the course of a long life, we have met death often face to face, the certainty of its near approach will cause a sudden revulsion of dread. How much more when we view it for the first time in the fulness of our health and youth!

"I will come," she said, "instantly."

And Lauretta, lighting the candle on the table, went away. Margaret knelt for one moment in prayer, that aid might be given to the sufferer, and those who should minister to her last need; and then, as speedily as possible, arranging her dress, proceeded to the Countess's room. Beatrice

was waiting for her. She was composed, even hopeful in manner, and in a tone more subdued, indeed, than usual, but quite free from excitement, said: —

"I knew you would desire to be sent for. All must soon be over, and Father Andrea wishes that you should take your last leave."

"But I would be with her," said Margaret, "even to the end."

"That may not be; the final offices of the Church must be performed, and she must not afterwards be disturbed by you."

A slight stress was laid upon the concluding word, and Margaret bitterly felt the separation which it implied.

"I will go with you to the door," continued the Countess, as Margaret still delayed; "we must not lose time."

She led the way into the dark gallery, and Margaret mechanically followed. They passed many half-opened, empty rooms, dimly lighted, for an instant, by the Countess's lamp, and Margaret shuddered. The desolateness of the house was tenfold increased at that solemn hour, and shadowy forms seemed hovering and gliding near, awaiting the release of the spirit which was about to escape from its earthly tabernacle.

"Father Andrea is there; but he will leave you alone," whispered the Countess, when she reached the top of the winding staircase that led to Rhoda's apartment.

Margaret drew back, afraid of the scene which she was about to encounter. Beatrice turned the handle of the door, and motioned to her to enter. The confessor was standing near the bed, holding a crucifix; but as he caught Margaret's footstep he moved aside for her to approach. One moment he

remained to watch the effect of that pallid, death-stricken countenance, upon her, whose spiritual interests were becoming the subject of his daily prayer, and then grasping Margaret's hand, he murmured a petition that she might be blest, and left her. The single attendant drew back into an inner room, and Margaret remained alone. Alone! with death! — Who does not shrink from the thought? and yet to that point must we all come, not merely in sight, but in personal experience. "*Il faut mourir seul*" is the sentence inscribed over us at our birth, and the longest life is but the longest preparation for our closing, solitary hour. Margaret bent over the dying girl, awe-struck and wondering. Every lineament was altered, and the feeble, gasping breath seemed each moment as though it would be the last.

"Rhoda," she said, and started at the sound of her own voice.

The glazed eye was steadfastly fixed upon her, and a smile rested upon the colourless lips.

"I am come to bid you farewell. God and our Saviour in mercy grant you comfort and acceptance! I must not be with you, but I will pray." Tears fell fast down Margaret's cheek, and her voice grew faint. "We shall meet again, dear Rhoda," she added; "we cannot now be parting for ever."

Rhoda raised her thin transparent fingers, and with a strength which seemed almost supernatural, repeated —"For ever! — no, you will be safe at last."

She feebly drew Margaret's hand towards her, and retained it, as if unwilling that she should go. There was a slight movement outside the chamber, and Margaret feared lest she had already delayed too long. She pressed her lips upon the pale forehead, around which the dews of death were already

gathering ; once more the eyes of both met in sympathy and true affection, and Margaret, casting one lingering look upon the bed of death, left the apartment as Father Andrea re-entered it.

Half an hour went by ; Margaret was kneeling in her chamber. She was praying for Rhoda, for the Countess, for her parents, her uncle, the children, —all whom she had ever loved. A sense of the unspeakable value of life, the unutterable awfulness of death, gave a hitherto unknown fervency to her petitions. The sound of a gliding tread was heard in the gallery, a faint knock at the door, and almost before Margaret could answer, the Countess Novera opened it. They looked at each other in silence. The Countess's lip quivered, and she leant against a chair to support herself. Margaret could not put into words the question which was on her lips. She threw her arms around the Countess to give the aid which it seemed was required ; and as the genuine movement of affection touched the inmost chords of Beatrice's heart, she hid her face upon Margaret's neck, and bursting into tears, exclaimed : —

" Oh, Margaret ! if you had been taken, how should I ever have known comfort again ? "

CHAPTER VIII.

The few days which intervened until after the funeral of Rhoda Newbolt were spent by Margaret in the peaceful, unrestrained enjoyment of the Countess's society. The event that had occurred was one to throw a more serious tone over their intercourse, but not to overwhelm them with depression. It involved no severing of earthly ties, no regret for past happiness, nor fear of future loneliness. She, from whom they had parted, had been in life isolated from the ordinary affections of a family; she had grown up amid strife and bitterness of words, and there were none really to lament her loss, except the sister, who could not wish her to return to encounter again the storms from which she had thus early escaped. In the remembrance of Beatrice, Rhoda Newbolt would ever be associated with an act of kindness, hallowed by religion; in that of Margaret, with the circumstances which had first placed her in connection with the Countess, and subsequently been the means of cementing their daily increasing regard. But all was now to be changed. Margaret received a summons to her home; and the Countess saw that Lucia must not be kept from hers. Father Andrea agreed that there could be no excuse for detaining Margaret at Henningsley; and though himself enjoying her visit, he did not, on her own account, lament the necessity of its conclusion. Between Henningsley

and the Grove there existed but a short distance in space, and a still shorter one in feeling. Margaret, he was assured, must be his convert; her heart was with Beatrice; her tastes were with Romanism. It required only a little longer the charm of the Countess's society, interchange of opinions, and recommendation of books, joined to a few decided arguments, to win his point. His object could, he thought, be almost as easily attained where there was a trifling separation, as by means of a residence under the same roof; for the pleasure of being together would counterbalance the pain of parting, and absence might serve to keep up the spirit of an affection, which, if its course were too smooth, would, perhaps, droop for want of a community of daily interests, as well as a community of tastes. Beatrice and Margaret, however, could not reason like Father Andrea. They counted days and hours, whilst forming plans for meeting, and schemes for similar studies; and hoped, even to the last, that something might intervene to give them the reprieve of another day. To Margaret this new affection came with all the enthusiasm and excitement of feelings which, from meeting with a return, were now, for the first time, fully called into action. The Countess had known a stronger, a higher, a more impassioned love; but though it still lived in her heart, and was cherished as sacred, and never to be forgotten, there had sprung up, beside it, a deep devotional spirit, which, by adding to her appreciation of Margaret's character an ardent desire for her conversion, seemed destined to supply, as far as could be, the place of the great happiness which had been taken from her.

"You will grant my request," said the Countess fondly, whilst they lingered together in the garden, watching the traces of the gorgeous sunset, which

were quickly disappearing from the western sky: "I must be Beatrice Novera to you from henceforth."

Margaret only smiled.

"Nay, I must not find you obstinate," continued the Countess, in a playful tone, "or you will arouse the proud will which I have warned you is my inheritance."

"I should not love you less," replied Margaret, "because you were the Countess Novera. That was the name by which I first knew you."

"But it is not the name which I love," answered the Countess; and after a moment's silence, she added mournfully,—"there are so few, so very few living now, who have a title to call me Beatrice."

Margaret turned to her with an expression of intense affection, and the Countess, resting her hand upon her shoulder, said, in the gentlest tone of her melodious voice, — "You are my Margaret, — why may I not be to you Beatrice?"

Margaret sighed, and a vision of her home came before her. It seemed little congenial to the moment. "I will call you Beatrice here," she said, "when we are together, alone; but, to the world, you must still be the Countess Novera. We could neither of us bear the treasure of our love to be rudely scanned, as it must and would be if I agreed fully to your wishes."

The Countess could not own herself contented. "A compromise," she said, rather reproachfully; "your English ways and English curiosity are beyond my comprehension — I have so long been accustomed to live unfettered."

The allusion to her foreign habits brought a change over Margaret's countenance, which Beatrice was not slow to perceive.

"You hate Italy as I love it," she continued; "there we shall never be agreed."

"I hate it but on your account," replied Margaret, "as it will one day take you from me."

"We will not think of the possibility," said the Countess, whilst her face brightened with an expression which Margaret did not comprehend; "I am not going now,—I may not go at all; and if I do, there may be changes which may still unite us. Let us speak of other things: you have promised me that you will read my books."

"Daily," replied Margaret; "they will be my chief enjoyment when I am absent from you."

"And you will read them with a free unbiassed mind, casting away, for my sake, the prejudices which might induce you to judge unfavourably of them?"

"As much as possible," answered Margaret; "but you must remember that you may require a difficult task. If they are like Pascal and Massillon, however, I shall have no prejudices to cast away."

"There are some differences," replied the Countess: "these put forth more openly the distinctive doctrines of the Church; but I think you will be much struck with their fervent piety."

Margaret again promised to study all that Beatrice might desire; though, at the same time, as much for the sake of her own conscience, as to warn the Countess against false expectations, she uttered a protest against the possibility of her being led to approve error because she might admire the form in which it was displayed. Beatrice made no profession of confident hope, for Father Andrea had tutored her into caution. Whatever was said arose naturally from circumstances; and even the wish that Margaret should read particular books seemed the necessary consequence of the harmony of their tastes.

The following day they parted. Margaret's grief was unrestrained, as the Countess spoke despondingly of the dreariness which all things would assume when she was absent; whilst Father Andrea expressed his earnest wishes that they might soon be permitted to renew the pleasure her visit had afforded.

"Our own at last, my daughter," said the confessor, when, after placing Margaret in the carriage, he went back to the Countess to watch it as it descended the hill. Beatrice did not respond to his hopes as he had expected. There were moments when the first regret which had chilled her proselytizing zeal, the fear that Margaret must suffer, returned in full force.

"And the anguish before that moment shall arrive!" she said.

"Do not dread it," replied Father Andrea; "it will be a purifying fire; and the common path of life is so unexciting to minds like Miss Percival's, that the prospect of suffering, even of martyrdom, would be a stimulus rather than a check to conversion."

Beatrice thought that it might be so; but, at the instant of separation, she felt too affectionately for Margaret, to bear to be the instrument of her trials. "Entreat for me, Father," she said, "that I may be ardent and unwearied like yourself in the cause of our holy Church;" and turning away from him, she retired to her own chamber, to strengthen herself by prayer and meditation against the tenderness which she feared was a sinful weakness.

What a change seemed to have passed over the Grove when Margaret returned to it! It was in a degree like a new home, or rather like the half-remembered scenes which we revisit after a long absence; strange at first, and without apparently a

claim upon our attachment, but gradually growing into distinctness, and at length becoming familiar to our memory, and casting in their turn a shadowy mist over the places and events which have intervened between them and the present hour. Much had been done and said during Margaret's visit, of which she had received little information from notes, though they had been frequent; and she was obliged to give attention, at least in appearance, to many domestic details, whilst in heaviness of heart her thoughts were reverting to Henningsley. It was better, however, to listen than to talk, especially when the talking involved the mention of the Countess's name before such an unsympathizing hearer as her mother. Mrs. Percival asked whether there had been any company, —whether there were many morning visitors,—what sort of establishment was kept,—whether the style of living were foreign or English,—and many similar queries, some of which Margaret had a real difficulty in answering; an ignorance extremely perplexing to Mrs. Percival, who always made herself acquainted with such subjects.

"Really, my dear," she said, "it is not worth while to stay from home, if you don't make yourself more amusing when you come back. Why, I never go to a common dinner party without finding out every thing there is worth knowing."

Margaret excused herself by saying that it had not been like an ordinary visit; every one had been occupied with Rhoda."

"Very probably, my dear; but, poor thing, she was not your relation. Most distressing it must have been, certainly; still, you went prepared for it, and you could not have been with her always."

Margaret saw that she must recall her scattered thoughts, and she repeated a few everyday par-

ticulars which she thought might be interesting, having a dread lest Mrs. Percival should revert to the poor girl's dying moments, and require her to detail them.

"We have done pretty well in your absence in the school-room," said Mrs. Percival, when Margaret at last succeeded in diverting the conversation from Henningsley. "The children are much improved, I must say; but there are a few of your ways which I have altered. That making them repeat dates so often seems unnecessary, and I think Philip learns too much Latin; and Harriet strikes me as being rather too young to begin Italian. But I am not going to interfere; you really have done wonders for them."

Margaret's heart sank: these little things seemed now so little. Scarcely an hour before, she had been conversing with the Countess Novera, lingering in her room to examine her books, and, as they turned over different volumes, touching upon subjects in which the destinies of the whole human race were concerned. Who could suddenly, without a jar, turn from such contemplations to estimate the importance of a chronological lesson, or to decide upon the quantity of Latin which should be learnt by a boy of seven years old?

A person like Margaret, possessed by an absorbing affection, and as yet only partially alive to the greatness of minor duties, certainly could not. She left her mother as quickly as possible, and shutting herself up in her own room, gave way to melancholy regrets. The next morning brought a more healthy tone of mind. Tidings from Mr. Sutherland, giving but an indifferent account of his health, and saying that he found it a great relief to have less duty and a smaller parish, again awakened Margaret's anxiety, and drawing her out of herself,

made her think more of her home and its occupations.

She could not connect any thoughts of her uncle with Henningsley; she did not even like to put them in juxta-position. Something in her heart,— or was it her conscience? — suggested that the two were not in harmony; and the more she dwelt upon the probability of Mr. Sutherland's being seriously unwell, the more her affection for him became paramount, and the less satisfied she was with herself for being inclined to neglect the duties upon which he always strongly insisted. Before going into the school-room she wrote him a short letter, begging him to let her know immediately what was really the matter; and in the postscript there was added: "Since you went away I have seen more of the Countess Novera; for I have been assisting her in attending upon the poor girl, whom you may perhaps remember to have heard me mention, Rhoda Newbolt. Indeed I have been at Henningsley for the last fortnight. I was the only person who took much interest in her besides the Countess." If this had ever reached Mr. Sutherland, it would not have given him much insight into Margaret's state; but it did not reach him. Margaret wrote it very hurriedly, on a slip of paper, which was added to the original note. She believed that both were put into an envelope together; but in her haste a blank piece was taken up instead, and the postscript fell to the ground, and was swept away by the servants.

Margaret's conscience, however, was satisfied, and she entered upon the business of the day more heartily in consequence. "Harriet, dear, you are dull this morning," she remarked, as a comment upon a particularly stupid answer to a question in history. Harriet coloured, and looked more dull than before.

"You must really try and give your full attention," proceeded Margaret. "It vexes me to find you gone back since I have been away."

Harriet went on with her reading; but it was very clear that her thoughts were any where rather than with her ancient history, and Margaret again reproved her several times. More blushes and confusion followed, and at length tears, and Margaret, closing the book, inquired, "What was the matter? She had not meant to speak angrily; she only wished for common attention."

Some seconds elapsed before any reply could be obtained, and then Harriet said something indistinctly, the purport of which seemed to be, as is usual in such cases, that nothing was the cause of the distress; and drying her tears, she proceeded in her lesson with greater care. Margaret was a little surprised, for Harriet was not accustomed to give way to feeling. Her chief characteristics were indolence, reserve, and a tendency to a morbid conscientiousness, if such an expression may be allowed. This disposition, though in some respects unlike Margaret's, still exhibited enough similarity to enable her in general to deal with it wisely. She took no more notice of what had passed, either then or in the course of the day; though, after a little observation, she was convinced that something was weighing upon her sister's mind. The idea was rather a benefit to herself in one way; for it served occasionally to call back her thoughts, when they had again travelled to Henningsley and the Countess. And yet, even here, Margaret found means to extract additional food for those dangerous speculations in which she now frequently indulged. At Harriet's age, confession would already be required in the Romish Church, and the child's mind would no longer be a sealed book; at least to

one person. Time was, when if such a fact had brought a question of right to Margaret, she would have longed to talk it over with her uncle, and gain his opinions: now, she reverted to Father Andrea. Much as she stood in awe of him, she was still more interested in his sentiments than in Mr. Sutherland's. It was late in the evening, and the children were gone to bed, when Margaret passed her sister's bed-room, on her return to the drawing-room. A light shone under the closed door, and Margaret remarked it as unusual. Harriet had been up stairs quite long enough to be in bed, and her candle ought to be extinguished. Margaret thought it an instance of the return of dawdling habits, and went in, intending to give an admonition. But there was only a rushlight in the apartment; the curtain was drawn at the side of the bed, and a slight noise was heard as of some one sobbing.

"Harriet, my love," said Margaret, rather frightened, "what is the matter?"

Harriet turned away, and finding herself without means of escape, took refuge in silence.

"Do tell me," continued Margaret; "you have made me uncomfortable all day by your manner."

"You will be so angry," said Harriet, speaking with difficulty; "but I never meant to do any thing so naughty."

"What was it, my dear? Don't be afraid to tell; it is much better that I should know."

"It was about the rules," sobbed Harriet; "those which you wrote down before you went away."

"Well, my dear, did you forget them?" asked Margaret, knowing that Harriet's remorse was not always a true criterion of the gravity of her offence.

"I promised to remember them, Margaret, and you said you were sure I should; but I forgot when

I was in a hurry, and sometimes I began to read story-books. Grace used to tell me of it; she recollects much better than I do."

"And was that all?" enquired Margaret.

Poor Harriet's distress broke forth again. "No, Margaret, it was worse than that, a great deal. When you came home you asked whether we had been good, and attended to the rules, and I said, yes. But I did not mean to tell a story, indeed I did not."

"And what made you say so, my love?" asked Margaret, in a grave tone.

"I don't know, it came out without my thinking about it."

"But you must have known it was not true, and you might have corrected yourself?"

"I was so frightened," said Harriet, "I could not at first; and I knew it would seem as if I had really meant it, if I were to go up and tell you afterwards. And I did try to recollect sometimes; but in playtime I forgot."

The thought arose in Margaret's mind whether she had been wise in making rules for playtime; but that was not an opportunity for determining. "It was wrong in you, certainly, my dear Harriet," she said; "but I am sure you did not really intend to deceive. What vexes me most is a thing which I have spoken to you about very often."

"Do you mean courage?" said Harriet.

"Yes, what we call moral courage; not being afraid to say out every thing at once. You are very particular in speaking the truth, and you would be a great deal happier if you could only be bold with it. You are forced to be so, sooner or later, because it makes you unhappy to keep any thing back."

"I shall never be able to do right things, like

you, Margaret," said Harriet. "I do such a number of naughty ones."

"But so we all do, my love. It is very hard work, indeed, to be good."

"I forget," continued Harriet; "and very often you don't know it."

A fresh fit of remorse was coming; and Margaret, much as she valued the little girl's tenderness of conscience, saw that it would be injudicious to encourage it just then. "We will not think too much about the past, my dear," she said. "Do you remember that verse in the Psalms, which says, that if God were extreme to mark what is done amiss, we should not be able to bear it? But there is mercy with Him, and we must trust to it, and try to do our best, and then He will love us for our Saviour's sake. Now I will fetch a shawl for you, and you shall get up and say a prayer by yourself, to ask Him to forgive you, and give you courage, and then to-morrow we will begin a new day."

She was going away, but Harriet caught her dress. "Margaret, I wish to say something more, if you don't mind."

Margaret put down her candle to listen, though aware that she was wanted in the drawing-room. In such a case any symptom of impatience would have been fatal to confidence.

"Do you recollect one day you told me about a little girl who used to write down her faults every night? I think I should remember mine a great deal better if I were to write them down."

Margaret considered for an instant. "Perhaps it would be a good plan. You shall try it, if you like."

"And will you give me a book to write in?"

"Yes, to-morrow, if you will remind me of it;

and it had better be kept in my room, because there no one will see it."

"Shan't you?" said Harriet, a little anxiously.

"Not unless you wish it, my love."

"But I would rather, Margaret, a great deal."

Margaret was surprised and pleased. This effort of confidence, where so much reserve had previously existed, was wholly unlooked for. "I will see it, if you desire it," she said; "but whenever you begin to dislike my doing it, I will leave off."

Harriet's mind seemed relieved, and Margaret went down stairs more satisfied with her plan of education than she had ever been before — always excepting the rules for playtime.

CHAPTER IX.

From this period, for the space of many weeks, Margaret's life continued, to all appearance, in the same tranquil routine as before her visit to Henningsley. Perhaps the very consciousness of the change that had passed, and was passing over her mind, made her more careful to conceal every indication of it beneath the steady fulfilment of her home occupations.

The frequent intercourse with Henningsley was the only exception to the rule, and even this was becoming to her parents a matter of course. One visit from the Countess, in which she had expressed enthusiastically her admiration of, though not her love for Margaret, had fully succeeded in gaining Mrs. Percival's hearty approbation of the intimacy, and there were now no checks to it beyond those interposed by distance or pressing duties. The latter were indeed occasionally neglected, for Margaret's whole heart was now yielded to the Countess, and the perfect sincerity of conscience which had once guided her in her daily life was at times warped by a blinding affection. She could, if necessary, make an excuse for visiting Henningsley, or find reason for giving the children a holiday, in order that she might spend the day there; whereas before, she would have thought that because inclination prompted her so strongly in one direction, it might at least be doubtful whether she should not be safer in deciding for the contrary. But if Margaret had

gone no farther, her peace of mind would have been in comparatively little danger. She was too conscientious to remain long unaware of any deviation from the right path; but it was conscience itself, the guiding principle of her conduct, which was by degrees becoming disordered. Margaret received no answer from Mr. Sutherland to confirm her doubts as to his approbation of her visit. To her surprise, Henningsley was not mentioned in the next letter, and after gathering from its contents that her uncle was not at all better, Margaret comforted herself under the pressure of anxiety by the reflection, that at least she might find relief with the Countess. Perhaps after all, her uncle thought the acquaintance of little consequence. Such was the first idea whenever any doubt arose as to her line of duty in this particular case; but in a short time even this was not required. Margaret studied the Countess's books, made many parts of the devotions her own, read the lives of the most eminent Romish saints, admired their austerities, and longed to be able to live like them a life apart from the world. The romance, which had once drawn beautiful visions of refined luxury, was now directed to the severities of penance and the simplicity of a convent cell. Could there be any harm in such imaginations? Was it not true that the current of the world's opinion would have led her to idolize wealth and fashion, and was there not something ennobling in the taste which could thus turn from such temptations, and find pleasure in the contemplation, and even in the practice of self-denial? Practice, — for Mr. Sutherland's simple rules did not suit with Margaret's more advanced opinions. She was aiming at what she fancied to be a more exalted course of life. Discipline was no longer a means, it was an end; and saintliness of character was measured not

merely by the purity of the inward life, but by fastings and privations, and penances, prescribed by the Romish but not by the English Church. Still, where was the harm? Margaret did not separate the outward from the inward act: she would have turned with horror from the misguided fanaticism which could substitute formal observances for purity of heart. All that she desired was holiness; and where then was the error? The answer may perhaps be found by considering well that prayer of our blessed Lord, offered for His disciples, when they were about to be left "as sheep without a shepherd." "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Not out of the world, but dwelling in it, in obedience to its common forms, in a cheerful compliance with its innocent usages, in home duties and gentle courtesies. And if to desire a more exalted sphere of action is to go beyond the spirit of the wishes which were breathed by infinite wisdom and perfect love, is it not possible that there may also be an ignorance of our real good in indulging an inclination for the severities of a foreign communion, instead of striving to perfect ourselves under our own? We are placed in the world as within a mould; our outward actions are to take its form, so far as that form is innocent, whilst the heart is to be dedicated to God. The Church of our country is a mould likewise; the wisdom of past ages, guided we may believe by the Spirit of God, fixed its limits, and the Providence of God ordained that we should be born into it. A dependence upon our own judgment, or upon that of some self-chosen guide, leads us to wish to cast off this mould and adapt ourselves to a different one. We are told that this is not wilfulness, but conscience. Are we sure that it is so?

At least it is worth while to consider; for it may be that the indication of God's will concerning us is to be found in the one, the indication of our own in the other. With Margaret a fundamental mistake lay in supposing that what might be advisable for some persons was advisable for all; that austerities and rules of life which might possibly be innocently adopted by the clergy, or by Christians of long experience and sober judgment, who were not likely to be led by them into any toleration of Romish errors, must of necessity be equally innocent for a young girl of an enthusiastic temperament, whose chief duty it was to train herself in submission to the authority set over her by God. If Grace or Philip had proposed to set themselves stricter lessons, and to deprive themselves of their play-hours in order to give more time to study, Margaret would have instantly seen that such wilfulness, even from a good motive, would be likely to have an injurious effect in the end. She would have told them that obedience was their duty, and the formation of rules hers. Or if, where free liberty was allowed them, they had always consulted the tastes and opinions of a stranger, she would equally have been alive to the danger of their choosing another guide instead of herself. There were parallel dangers in her own tone of mind, but her eyes were not open to perceive them.

That bright genial summer, with its deliciously warm days and calm evenings, some spent entirely at Henningsley, and others made happy by the recollection of long conversations and pleasant walks, and the prospect of speedily enjoying more, was one of complete enchantment to Margaret. Her life was no longer insipid, family anxieties had little power to harass her. At Henningsley, romance, affection, and sympathy always awaited her. And

Margaret felt herself ennobled by being with the Countess; her principles were so unworldly, her thoughts so exalted; whilst in taste there was scarcely a shadow of difference between them. Music, poetry, painting, the literature of the day, or the deeper studies of theological writers, formed their usual occupation and topics of interest, and in all Margaret found something to charm her. She could listen with the most unwearied pleasure whilst the Countess, as long as her strength allowed, poured forth her rich, full, devotional tones, in the glorious compositions of Mozart and Beethoven, or read aloud extracts from her favourite authors, or discussed the treasures of the Vatican, and described the peculiar beauties of Raphael, Correggio, Michael Angelo, Guido, and the long list of artists and sculptors who have been celebrated throughout the world. Italy was now become a familiar land to Margaret, and by degrees she learnt to regard it in the same light with the Countess, not merely as the great centre of historical associations, but as the seat and fountain-head of Christianity; for if it were enjoyment to enter into the Countess's feelings when she spoke of human arts and institutions, still more delightful was it to share the spirit of her devotion when she spoke of the Romish Church. Upon that subject above all others Beatrice loved to expatiate, yet not without prudence and forethought. She did not enter into argument, but she took pains to open Margaret's eyes to many of the exaggerations which hitherto had warped her judgment, when thinking of Romanists. Instructed by Father Andrea, the Countess was careful to set forth the theory rather than the practice of her Church, and this in its mildest form. Margaret learnt that indulgences were a remission of temporal canonical punishments, and, supposing this to mean simply

the remission of ecclesiastical penances, she inquired no farther. Nothing was said to her of such inscriptions as that in the church of "S. Pietro in Carcere," at Rome, which grants every day to each one who shall visit it one thousand two hundred years of indulgence, doubled on Sundays and festivals, and moreover every day the remission of the third part of sins. She was taught to regard the titles of "Ark of the Covenant," "Gate of Heaven," "Refuge of Sinners," by which the Blessed Virgin is addressed by Romanists, as founded entirely upon the worship of Him who condescended to be born of a woman; and she did not seek to know whether such titles were sanctioned by the primitive Church, and whether they do not pre-suppose a knowledge (only to be obtained by revelation) of what the present state of the Mother of our Lord now is, together with her possession of that attribute of omnipresence which shall enable her to hear the prayers of all at all times. So again Margaret was informed that the Romish Church was infallible; but she did not ask that, which no one yet has been able to determine, where the infallibility lies. She heard it asserted that the early heresies were denounced by the Catholic Church, without pausing to doubt whether Catholic and Roman Catholic were synonymous terms, or whether the Bishop of Rome was at that time the supreme head of the Christian Church. She heard the Council of Trent placed on the same footing with the first General Councils, and it did not enter into her head to study its constitution, or to question how it could be a General Council, when so large a portion of the Christian world as the Greek Church was excluded from it. She was told that Romanism was identically the same as primitive Christianity, and knowing little of either, she took the assertion for granted, whilst at the same time

she was unconsciously guilty of the gross unfairness of judging Rome by her theory, the English Church by her practice, and then in her own mind pronouncing one inferior to the other. But Margaret had no notion of arguing or controverting. She was led on insensibly and happily, and her life was too full of enjoyment to allow of her entertaining misgivings as to where all this would lead. Yet there were times when the idea was pressed upon her. Some grievous inconsistency in the English Church, or some attractive doctrine in the Romish, did now and then startle her with the thought — "it may be that I have been educated in error." And what did Margaret do? write to Mr. Sutherland? He was ill and away; his answers would be seen by her mother. Her inmost feelings, those most cherished and sacred, might thus be made the subject of common inspection and observation. Margaret thought that this could not be required of her. She considered it a reason for delay; her difficulties were as yet indefinite, and her early prejudices were strong; and in the mean time she put aside the convictions which were impressing themselves upon her conscience, yielded more and more to the attractions of the Countess's society, and proceeding onwards in the dangerous path, closed her eyes to the end to which it led, and almost believed that she did not know what it must be.

But autumn came, and Margaret feared that all her delights would cease. The affections of the Countess, however, were now too much engrossed, and she was too well satisfied in fulfilling the duties which she had made for herself, to endure the thought of an absence from home during the winter months. She persuaded Father Andrea that her constitution was now inured to an English climate, and that, with a little precaution, Henningsley

might be made as desirable a residence as Lady Anstruther's house in Devonshire, which she might again have visited, if it had been required. The confessor was easily brought to this opinion, for he also had formed occupations for himself, which, for the time, were sufficient to engage him. The Countess's Roman Catholic tenantry required his constant attention; the number of converts was increasing in some of the neighbouring towns, and as a man of superior talents and long experience, he was much looked up to by the priests of his own communion, with whom he had become acquainted in that part of the country, and felt himself as useful there as he might have been in a more visibly extensive sphere of action. All things seemed tending to the one point which he had so much at heart — Margaret's conversion; for when others were setting an example of a change of opinion, it was not likely that she would remain uninfluenced. To hear that any individual, whether educated or uneducated, had joined the communion of Rome, was an incentive to her to think more seriously upon the subject; and Father Andrea took care that no instance should remain unnoticed. He did more now than allude to these cases, he enlarged upon the circumstances, if they were at all likely to attract her notice, and, in general, finished by describing the beauty of some new chapel; or the excellent rules of some projected convent; or, by pointing out the advances towards the true faith which had been made within the last few years. Still, he ventured as yet no further. Margaret eagerly drank in all that he said, but her lips were closed; and Father Andrea would have been content to wait weeks and months, even years, rather than incur the risk of destroying, by a premature word or look, the confidence which it was his object to gain.

The Countess and Father Andrea were patient; but there was one other inmate of Henningsley whose spirit was by this time galled and wounded almost beyond endurance. Lucia Fontana could no longer be blind to the Countess's affection for Margaret — an English girl and a heretic. Her jealousy had prophesied it from the first moment of their meeting, and the prophecy was now working to its completion. Lucia was nothing, Margaret was every thing; and Lucia hated Margaret with the intensity inherent in the character of the ardent nations of the South. Father Andrea knew this, and reproved, and warned; and the Countess guessed it, though not fully. Lucia's manner was but little altered; and the observations, which sometimes escaped her in disapprobation of Margaret or her family, were considered by Beatrice to be more the result of a passing annoyance than the indications of a rooted aversion. The family indeed were more avowedly the objects of Lucia's dislike than Margaret herself. She spoke openly against the one, whilst against the other she only insinuated. But whatever she might choose to state, she had an advantage over the Countess, for Beatrice had no power to contradict her. Through the intimacy with Mrs. St. Aubyn Lucia obtained a knowledge of many traits of character which she knew would be particularly repugnant to the Countess's taste; and these were prominently brought forward whenever occasion offered. Beatrice had a particular dread of the money-getting, money-loving spirit of her countrymen, and even a loathing of the same disposition, when exhibited in persons of her own sex. Matrimonial speculations in such cases she considered as tainting the whole character; and if, when Lucia affirmed that the Percivals were a mercenary family, that the Doctor thought of nothing but making his

fortune, and Mrs. Percival of contriving an economical show, the Countess was much pained; her disgust, when she heard from the authority of Mrs. St. Aubyn that Agatha had married for money, without a particle of affection, was, to Lucia's eyes, plainly and very satisfactorily apparent. Mrs. St. Aubyn had no idea of the use that would be made of the observations which from time to time she let fall before the young foreigner. She merely did with her as she had done with all her former protegées, she made her a confidante; and as the animosity between herself and Agatha was increasing in virulence, so it was, as a matter of course, known by Lucia. Margaret was not directly affected by this; but there is something contaminating in a family character. Beatrice could not for an instant believe that Margaret herself partook of the spirit she so much disliked; but it was very painful to hear it imputed to her relations. She wished, and now and then she thoughtlessly expressed the wish aloud, that Margaret was not a Percival; and then Lucia would sigh, and look mysterious, and wish the same; and when Margaret again appeared at Henningsley, the Countess found herself unconsciously weighing her words, and watching; until, wretched at the bare idea of suspicion, she bitterly reproached herself for unkindness, and throwing herself with renewed animation into the subject under discussion, forgot in the charm of Margaret's presence that the doubt of a hidden fault had ever been presented to her mind.

CHAPTER X.

We must once again imagine ourselves to have reached the beginning of January. A keen, biting wind was sweeping down the desolate streets of Staunton, and the thick grey sky was becoming heavier and more gloomy as the first flakes of a long-threatened snow-storm drifted lightly to the ground. Here and there one or two straggling, idle men, were standing with their hands in their pockets, beating their feet upon the pavement; and occasionally a charity school girl, wrapping her brown cloak about her, trudged quickly past, on her way to a poverty-stricken home; or a boy trundling his hoop, ran boldly in the middle of the road, rather delighting than not in the distant probability of being met by a slow-paced waggon or a taxed cart. Other vehicles and other persons there were none. It was one of those days on which the most determined pedestrians are inclined to cling to their fire-sides, and breathe a sigh of pity over those whom necessity exposes to the inclemency of the weather. Miss Debrett looked over her parlour blind, and called to her maid Susan to tell her whether she did not think it would snow before long. Susan was busy in the kitchen, and considered that the question would very well remain unanswered until she had finished putting away the dinner dishes; and on Miss Debrett's principle of never hurrying any one, she was allowed to continue undisturbed until the work was finished, when she

appeared in the parlour, and, the question being repeated, she went to the window and reported that something was at that moment falling. Sleet, it looked like; but it was quite cold enough for snow.

"So it is, Susan, as you say, quite cold enough; I thought we should have snow last night. My bed had not half sufficient clothes on it. Mind you put on another blanket to-night."

Susan stated that her mistress only possessed two spare blankets, and that the best of them had been lent. It was a hint that money might be usefully expended in the purchase of more; but Miss Debrett's purse was peculiarly empty at Christmas time. A few bills, and a few pensioners, seldom failed to reduce her means of providing herself with comforts to a low ebb.

"To be sure, I forgot; but I must have my cloak instead; I wish every one could do as well, Susan."

Susan professed the same wish, and then went on to dilate upon the wants of the neighbourhood, and the exertions made to relieve them, saying that the Henningsley people were the best off of all, for the Countess looked after them as if they were her children; and when she could not do it, either the priest or Miss Percival was sure to be amongst them. People said it was strange of Miss Percival to go so much with the Romanists; but, for her part, she should like to see the day when other folks would only do half as much good.

"It is true, Susan; my dear Margaret is very good, but I should be glad to see her a little more cheerful. Young people should not have such grave heads upon their shoulders. I do think sometimes she must be in love."

Susan laughed, but declared she had never heard any thing about it, and she should be sure to

have done so if there was any thing going on, for Baker told her every thing.

"Well! I can't imagine what it can be, then," continued Miss Debrett, musingly. "She is not at all like the same creature she was, and she can have nothing now to make her anxious; dear Agatha and the child doing so well."

"And such a beautiful little thing, ma'am," said Susan. "Baker protests she has never seen such another, since Mrs. Clive was a baby herself; but then it's a girl!"

"A disappointment, Susan," said Miss Debrett, gravely; "but I hope Agatha will not fret about it, because it would not be right."

"It's the Colonel most, ma'am, I believe. He had set his heart upon its being a boy."

"Very likely, Susan; but those things are not at our ordering." Miss Debrett spoke with marked seriousness, for she herself, one of a family of five daughters and no son, had early seen the effect which a parent's vexation from such a cause may have upon the character and happiness of his children. "I don't think it can be that which is upon Margaret's mind," she continued; "she speaks quite cheerfully about it, and always says how fond Agatha is of the baby. Perhaps it may be about her uncle; but then the last accounts were better. Certainly to be abroad for health is an anxious thing, and Mr. Sutherland was never like any one else, he was so thin."

In the middle of this speech Susan departed, for she knew it was only meant as a soliloquy; and before her mental vision there happened to be at that moment a large kettle, fuming and boiling, and wasting its contents upon the kitchen floor, — perhaps even endangering the safety of the tabby cat, which she had left stretched at full length

before the fire. Miss Debrett stayed a short time longer at the window, watching the snow, which was now falling fast. She had a desolate feeling at her heart, for that long afternoon and evening would, she supposed, be spent alone. Even Margaret's kindness could not be expected to brave a snow storm. But she was mistaken. Before she had made up her mind whether to take up a book, or some work, or to look over some old letters, or, in fact, in what way to occupy the lingering hours, a slight figure, enveloped in a wrapping plaid cloak, and sheltered by a large umbrella, was seen crossing the road; and Miss Debrett, recognising it with delight, hastened to open the front door herself, that "her dear Margaret" might not be kept waiting in the cold. "Come in, my love. How extremely good of you! But, dear me! how wet and damp you are! Here, Susan, take Miss Percival's cloak into the kitchen; and your shoes, my dear—are you sure those Gloucester boots have kept you dry? Just let me look."

Margaret assured her that she was perfectly protected, and Miss Debrett, kissing her, though scarcely looking in her face, led the way into the parlour, stirred the fire, put on some coals, and begged her to sit down and be comfortable. Poor Margaret! There was an old-fashioned glass hanging over the mantel-piece, and, as she caught a glimpse of her own countenance whilst standing before it, she almost started at its expression. It was a pale, care-fraught face; a mouth vainly striving to assume a smile, eyes dim and lustreless, and eyelids marked by the traces of tears. But Margaret was gifted with great powers of self-command, and whatever might be her hidden grief, it was not suffered to appear in the cheerful tone in which she

said—"I knew you would be expecting a visitor this afternoon."

"No, my dear, not expecting. I could not have done that, you know, with the snow coming down so fast; but you are all the more welcome. And now, tell me how things are going on at home."

Margaret did not instantly reply, and Miss Debrett, for the first time remarking her attentively, perceived her look of distress. "My love, why, you are quite ill! How dreadful! what can it be?"

Margaret succeeded in a smile, said she was very well, but very cold, and drew her chair nearer to the fire, so as to turn her countenance from the light.

"Cold! you are ghastly! You shall have a little warm wine and water directly. I don't think you ought to have come out such an afternoon as this; but you always are so kind."

Margaret did not refuse the wine and water, for the preparation occupied Miss Debrett's attention for some minutes, and in that time she tried to recover her natural expression.

"There, my dear," said Miss Debrett, placing on the table a tumbler of hot negus, and a plate of biscuits; "just try that, and tell me if it is sweet enough; and then let me know about you all. What is the news from Ashington?"

"Very good, indeed! Agatha is able to walk about as well as ever, and the baby grows delightfully."

"Dear little thing! I do long to see it again. And the Colonel, my dear,—is he quite well and happy?" "Quite well," Margaret allowed he was, the happiness she did not mention. "He will soon get over his disappointment in not having a boy," continued Miss Debrett. "Papas are always fond of little girls. Does he carry it about much?"

Margaret's sadness could not prevent her from

laughing at the idea of Colonel Clive carrying a baby, and Miss Debrett laughed also, and much longer than Margaret. Her face became almost immediately grave again, and when Miss Debrett observed that the child must prove a great blessing, she only answered by a sigh.

"But I have forgotten your uncle, Margaret; you said you expected a letter from him."

"Yes, and we had one to-day; he is in Switzerland, and better."

"Better! that is very good news; and when does he talk of being in England again?"

"He does not say, exactly; but he engaged his curate for six months. He thought it best to do so when he found himself ill at Mr. Morland's small living, because the physician said that if that little work was too much for him, he must need an entire long rest."

"And how charmed you will be to see him again! Let me think,—how long is it since he went away?"

"He exchanged duties with Mr. Morland in June," said Margaret; "and before that he had not been here for some weeks."

"No, I remember. What a pity it was he did not come over before he went abroad!"

"He could not," said Margaret; "he was too ill."

"Well! you will not have long to wait; the months slip by very fast." Miss Debrett's sight was not clear, and she did not perceive Margaret's increased melancholy. She went on talking for some time very contentedly, and hearing every thing which could be interesting.

"Her mother," Margaret said, "was very well, but anxious about Dr. Percival, who had seemed ill the preceding evening, yet had been kept at the

house of a patient all night, and was not returned. It was decided at length that Philip should go to a preparatory school, and little Juliet was to become her pupil. Margaret was sorry to part with Philip, he was growing so tractable; but she considered it best for him, and Juliet would not be at all the worse for strictness."

"Little darling!" exclaimed Miss Debrett; "she is growing a great beauty; very like Agatha, I think. I wish she may have just as happy a lot in life." Again Margaret sighed. Miss Debrett's hopes and wishes certainly were most unfortunate. "And you are as busy as ever, my love? but you must miss going to Henningsley this weather."

Margaret replied that she did miss it very much; but that she had seen the Countess only the day before, and had engaged to dine and sleep there on the next Monday, as her mother had not been able to spare her for New Year's Day.

"Why that was natural," said Miss Debrett; "you always have such comfortable parties at home. It was very pleasant this time; but do you remember how happy we were last year? the Colonel and dear Agatha dining with us, and Mrs. St. Aubyn bringing me home in her carriage? All we wanted then was to have Craven and George to make up the party; but they seldom manage to be here till later."

At the mention of Craven's name, Margaret showed unconsciously that she was distressed. It was by a momentary contraction of the brow; but she answered quietly—"We expect George to-morrow."

"So soon! How pleasant! and how glad your uncle will be to know that George is doing well! He always said he was the clever one of the boys, and would make the best figure in the world."

"George is steady," observed Margaret, rather

pointedly; "that is his chief merit. I really believe he has a great chance of a fellowship eventually, if he will go on as he has begun."

"So I have heard from several people. I think, Margaret, it was a good thing that your father did not put him with Mr. Dampier, in the merchant's office."

"It would not have suited him," replied Margaret. "His heart is devoted to the Church—more so now than ever; and Mr. Dampier is remarkably eccentric; they would not have done well together."

"Well, my love, I hope we shall live to hear George preach. That will repay you for all your anxiety about him—your father and mother, and you too; for I know you have had a good deal of thought for him at times. But you will forget it all then, it will be such happiness."

Margaret rose very suddenly, and took up her bonnet. "I must run away, now," she said, in a changed voice. "I had only twenty minutes to spare, when I came out."

"Only twenty minutes!—such a very short time. But I won't complain of you; it was more than I deserved that you should come at all. Just take a little more wine and water, though, before you go out—Susan can make it hot in a minute."

"None, thank you; really I must be quick. May I ring for my cloak?" The cloak and the Gloucester boots were brought, having been dried and warmed. Margaret was wrapped and pinned up, and it was almost insisted that Susan should go up the road with her to carry the umbrella; but the offer was steadily declined, and Margaret took leave, Miss Debrett watching her from the window till she was out of sight, to see that she did not slip.

CHAPTER XI.

Margaret had left her home to pay a short visit of kindness to a friend, oppressed indeed by care, yet without the prospect of any material alteration in her daily existence; but when she returned to it, the face of the servant who opened the door told a tale of alarm, which instantaneously conjured up no common fears. "My mistress has just sent for you, ma'am," were the few simple words which reached her ear, and there was a pause.

"Why, what! tell me what has happened," exclaimed Margaret, about to rush up stairs. Symonds respectfully put out his hand to stop her.

"If you will excuse me, ma'am, you will only be frightened. Mr. Harrison is here, and we hope my master will be better presently."

"Better,— papa! what do you mean?"

"We don't know quite what is the matter, ma'am," replied Symonds. "My master came in a little while ago and asked for his letters, and as he was reading them he looked very ill, and then he fell back and fainted. I was in the room at the time, and —"

Symonds did not conclude his sentence, for Margaret turned so pale that he could only place her in a chair, and hasten to fetch a glass of water.

"Oh, Craven!" involuntarily ejaculated Margaret. She stood up, and staggered rather than walked to the foot of the stairs. There was a noise in the lobby above, and it recalled her to herself. She heard her mother's voice; but had scarcely

power to repeat her name so as to give notice that she was returned. Mrs. Percival was giving orders to a servant; quick as usual, and imperative, — but very nervous. "Mamma," said Margaret, with all the firmness she could rally; "stay, pray stay, I will come up."

Symonds appeared with the water; but was motioned away, and Margaret seeing that her mother was waiting for her, hastened, though with difficulty, to meet her."

"Your father is better rather, I hope, my love," began Mrs. Percival, forestalling Margaret's questions. "His pulse is a little recovering. Mr. Harrison has just left him."

"And you are not anxious, mamma?"

"I don't know — I can't say. Come here, my dear." Mrs. Percival moved with her usual rapidity across the lobby, opened a dressing-room door, made Margaret go in before her, then followed, and after turning the lock, sank into a chair, and exclaimed — "Oh! Margaret, happen what may, it is Craven's doing."

Margaret could not think of any comfort, for she was stunned. "When did papa see the letters?" she said at length.

"Directly he came in. I knew how he would take it to heart, if there were any upon this business. But, Margaret, we don't know the worst yet, I am sure. Let me hear again the letter you had from Craven this morning."

Margaret immediately produced it. "It is nothing but incoherency," she said, hoping that her mother would read the few lines to herself; but Mrs. Percival did not offer to do this, and Margaret was obliged to go on,—"Margaret, I am in despair,— ruined. — I care not who knows it,— my father must immediately. Applications will be made to him. I

am the major's debtor for two thousand pounds. Don't write to me. It matters not what becomes of me! There is his signature at the bottom, and that is all."

"The creditors have written to your father," said Mrs. Percival, speaking slowly, as if each word was dragged from her; "there must have been extravagancies going on when the last crash happened. Craven never would be open."

"He must have been so now," said Margaret bitterly.

Mrs. Percival groaned, and her hand shook very much, as she tried to rise from her chair. "I must go back to your father. Don't come, Margaret; you can do no good. Write to Ashington, and say his pulse is better; or, stay,—wait till we hear again what Mr. Harrison says an hour hence." Mrs. Percival was going away; but Margaret entreated that she might see her father, and could not be prevailed on to remain behind. Mrs. Percival was less positive than usual, and Margaret entered the chamber. The spectacle which presented itself was worse than she had expected. The change in that short space of time was great enough to shock her. She kissed her father; but he took no notice, and she turned aside unable to relieve herself by tears; then looked again, more steadfastly, more narrowly. The features seemed to recover something of their resemblance; but after a movement it was lost. Margaret stood fixed to the spot, till her mother's whisper aroused her.

"Margaret, there are the letters; look at them."

Margaret took them mechanically; but she could not gain the sense of their meaning. The words floated before her eyes. She saw something about accounts demanded, and never settled, and there was one letter from a personal friend of Dr. Per-

cival's, stating that he feared his son was in great difficulties ; but the details were unintelligible.

"You must go, my dear," said Mrs. Percival, approaching her, "there is nothing for you to do here."

Margaret asked for the children. They had been sent into the school-room, with orders not to come out of it till they were told. Margaret had better take care of them, and write to Ashington, and dine by herself. Her mother would not come down stairs, she was too anxious ; and Dr. Percival was to have a warm bath immediately. Margaret gathered up the letters and went away to her own room. Alone, with the letters spread before her, she tried to make out the full extent of Craven's errors, but she soon found that the whole could not be known. It was clear that he had broken his promise and returned to the gaming-table. His own note gave that confession ; and to one person his debt was two thousand pounds. He must have been desperate before he ventured to play so high ; probably he might owe more. The creditors' bills seemed to be of long standing. "Bill delivered" Margaret read repeatedly. She suspected that Craven, instead of satisfying them when his father had before agreed to pay his debts, had only rid himself of some of the most pressing claims, and kept the rest of the money for his personal expenses. The idea was full of anguish, for such conduct could not be called any thing but dishonourable. He might perhaps have made plausible excuses to himself, but there was nothing really to extenuate it. Margaret, however, tried not to judge, though she could not but fear that Craven's natural weakness of character might induce him to yield to any temptation under an immediate pressure. It was certain at least that he had broken a positive promise, and Margaret's susceptible conscience was instantly awake to the

question, whether she might not have prevented it. Her letters had been cold and uninteresting, merely confined to home details about which Craven cared very little; whilst his in return were hasty scraps, sometimes written in great excitement, sometimes merely saying that he was well, and that his regiment had been ordered to such a place. Margaret blamed herself in part; but it was clear that a public correspondence such as her mother insisted hers should be, was not one likely to do any good to her brother. She had occasionally reminded him of his engagement; but she did not like to do so often, since he was naturally tenacious of interference from a younger sister. The exact degree in which she might have exerted herself could not be determined, and in consequence a portion of self-reproach was added to the bitterness of her sorrow. And very bitter it was. Margaret knew that neither her father nor her mother would allow Craven ultimately to take the consequences of his actions. They would complain and be miserable; but Craven would be set free, and his family would be the sufferers. This was the very best that could be anticipated; and if worse things should happen,— if Dr. Percival's illness were really to prove serious, what was to become of his family? George at College, Philip to be educated, all the expenses of an establishment to be kept up. The insurances might be considerable, but they were not likely to be sufficient for such emergencies. Margaret was full of forebodings; but it seemed selfish and cold-hearted to think of such things rather than of her father's possible danger, and the pecuniary cares were soon driven away by the more immediate anxiety, while she tried to rouse her sinking faith and believe that all would be well, because all was appointed in mercy. There was a quaint sentence

of Jeremy Taylor's, which had formerly forcibly impressed itself upon her memory, and which was now recalled to assist in chasing away the cloud of mistrust that made still darker the prospect of her father's illness. "It is certain that man wants faith who dares be more confident of being supplied when he hath money in his purse, than when he hath it only in bills of exchange from God." Margaret said the words over; but they were followed by a sense of wretchedness so great, that in agony she threw herself upon her knees, not daring to utter a prayer, but seeking only that the attitude of supplication might be pitied and accepted.

Faith—the faith of a Protestant—was it rightly grounded? Could she believe that God would be with her in trial, if she were wilfully an alien from the true Church? Margaret had at length reached the point at which inclination is followed by real doubt, and it was now that the struggle was beginning. Now, in sickness and sorrow, when the utmost comforts of religion were needed for her support, her mind was to be torn by conflicting feelings; opposing wills; abstruse reasonings. Yet, what right had she to murmur? She had brought it upon herself. In the day of prosperity she had dallied with temptation; in the day of adversity she was permitted to feel its power. There are certain stages both in conviction and action, which are reached only by slow degrees, but beyond which the progress is very rapid. Six months with the Countess and Father Andrea; six months' study of Romish books, and use of Romish devotions; and six months of clever argument, aided by the most endearing affection, had—not completed the work of conversion,—Margaret was by no means convinced, — but raised such a tumult of doubt, that the truths upon which she had formerly rested were often

shaken to their foundation. Within the last two months Margaret had entered upon religious subjects more openly in conversation, from curiosity — to please the Countess — because she was dissatisfied with the state of the English Church — neither reason in the least justifiable for tampering with a creed which she had been taught was erroneous; she continued it under the belief that Romanism would suit her particular turn of mind; because the ardent expressions put into her mouth by the devotional books which she was accustomed to use, served to elevate her feelings; because she admired the self-denying lives portrayed in the Romish saints; and had learnt to think that scourgings, and fastings, and a voluntary deprivation of every comfort of life, must be in themselves virtues. She was now to go one step beyond. When the solace of religion was most necessary, the fearful inquiry arose clearly, — "Is there truth in the Church to which I belong?" This inquiry had been strenuously urged upon her by the Countess, on the preceding day. Margaret rejected it by a positive assertion which she felt was nothing more than assertion, and on her return home tried to satisfy herself by her own arguments. But could find none. The English Church had not been thoroughly examined, and Margaret had little to say for it. With Romish arguments, on the contrary, she had been carefully furnished; they presented themselves again and again. Still there were some almost incredible doctrines, and others very confusing. In such a state of bewilderment, where should she find assistance? Mr. Sutherland was her natural adviser; but he was far distant. To know that she was in the least wavering might, in his weakened state of health, be injurious to him; and a private correspondence would be very diffi-

cult. Besides, Margaret questioned whether such a step would be right. She fancied herself improved, less worldly, more earnest and watchful, since she had known the Countess, followed her opinions, studied her books, and pursued a stricter course of discipline. Yet there was no doubt that Mr. Sutherland would require her to relinquish, some, at least, of these apparent means of good. Margaret's distress of mind had been extreme from indecision, and in the present season of sorrow it became unendurable. A half hour of anguish was spent before she could in the least find comfort. During that time family anxieties weighed upon her mind; but there was nothing to give relief. Words of prayer rose to her lips, but doubt arrested them; and at length, finding that devotion could give her no alleviation, whilst conscience accused her of weakness and insincerity, she strove to forget all her other trials, and determine how she was to act with regard to this, the greatest of all. She might go at once to Father Andrea. He would be delighted to listen to her, for he had before implied as much; but Margaret had never yet been able to confess to what a degree her belief in the English Church was shaken. Pride and reserve had kept her back. Yet something must be done, and, as explanation and instruction seemed that which she most needed, and it was certain he could give both, Margaret at length satisfied her conscience by resolving clearly to understand her own difficulties; to think them over, and write them down, and then apply to the confessor. The plan would take time; but she thought it most likely to be satisfactory in the end, for, with her present confusion of ideas, it was probable that conversation would only render the controverted points more perplexing. This being settled, she was once more comparatively at rest.

She could pray, and hope that her prayers might be accepted ; or if the question did arise, as to the safety and wisdom of the course she was adopting — not seeking the guidance of a clergyman of her own Church, but referring for aid to a priest of the Church of Rome, thus following her own will rather than the course indicated by Providence, — it was answered by the remembrance that she was not deciding — only inquiring ; as if human reason can be uninfluenced by the opinions of those of whom it seeks counsel. Margaret, however, was, for the time being, satisfied. She could think of the children ; and write to Ashington ; but before any other claim, she recollected Beatrice, and, regardless of the weather, prepared a note which might be conveyed to Henningsley by the Ashington messenger, although the distance between the two places was considerable. Where the Countess was concerned she had little thought of difficulty either in giving or taking trouble. It was a long and dreary evening which followed, but there was some comfort at the close of it. Dr. Percival was pronounced much better, and Margaret went to bed hoping that, as before, the threatened evils might pass away.

CHAPTER XII.

A FEW days afterwards the Countess and Lucia were sitting together in the little room which Beatrice had lately had fitted up for her especial use. It was her usual retreat when Margaret was with her, and Lucia looked upon it for that reason with a jealous eye. She was cheerful, however, at this particular moment, occupying herself with some work which was to be given to Mrs. St. Aubyn; whilst the Countess at another table was planning a school-house, in which the children of her Romanist tenantry were to be educated gratuitously. The occupation was interesting to her in itself, and more so because Margaret had assisted in the plans. Yet her attention was not given to it fully, for her eye often wandered to the door; and when at length a servant entered with a note, she rose hastily to take it from him, and opening it instantly, read it at once, without returning to her seat. Lucia looked inquiringly, but asked no questions.

"Dr. Percival is a good deal better, but still extremely weak," said the Countess, aloud.

Lucia went on with her work, remarking that "it was a fearfully sudden illness. Mrs. St. Aubyn thought it must have been something mental which caused it."

"Very likely; Dr. Percival has a great deal of anxiety with his patients."

"And with his family," replied Lucia. "Mrs. Clive is ill, and out of spirits."

"I thought she was quite recovered," said the Countess.

"Yes, as far as strength goes; but she appears very wretched."

"The Colonel's fault," began the Countess; but Lucia interposed—

"Ah, Signora, he has enough to try him. It must be sad to have such a selfish wife."

This was the frequent style of conversation, and Beatrice could not bear it.

"The Percivals have all such notions of spending money," continued Lucia, "which is the reason they are so anxious to have it."

"That is what you always say, Lucia," replied the Countess, coldly. "Can you tell me nothing new?"

"Pardon me, Signora; I was not aware I should displease you."

"You do not displease me, Lucia; whatever you hear, it is a matter of indifference to me; but I should like to think you had something better to occupy your thoughts."

Lucia bit her lip; she had lately become very tenacious of reproof. "I only supposed, Signora," she replied, with some pride in her manner, "that you might be interested in hearing about the family, on account of Miss Percival; and Mrs. St. Aubyn told me yesterday that she had guessed the cause of Dr. Percival's illness."

"And what was it?" inquired Beatrice, not able to conceal her curiosity.

"The eldest son has been extravagant again," replied Lucia; "Mrs. St. Aubyn heard it from a cousin who is in the same regiment. They say he will ruin his father."

The Countess showed unconsciously that the information annoyed, as well as distressed her.

"Are you sure you are speaking from good authority, Lucia?" she inquired.

"I am repeating what I heard, Signora; and I know that Mrs. Clive has more money from her husband than she can possibly spend; and Mrs. St. Aubyn imagines a great deal of it must have gone to this brother. They are a needy race."

The Countess put aside her drawing, and went to look at the weather. She seemed full of thought, and Lucia not meeting with a reply, continued, marking attentively, as she spoke, the effect which she produced. "Miss Percival, of course, is an exception to her family. She must be very much vexed to see things going on in the way they do. The son is constantly at the gaming-table; and they say that his dealings are not always honourable."

"Did Mrs. St. Aubyn tell you so?" asked the Countess, quickly.

Lucia coloured. "No, I forget whom I heard that from; it was not Mrs. St. Aubyn. She only remarked upon the family faults, the love of money and extravagance joined."

Beatrice again resumed her drawing, and Lucia, believing that she had given sufficient food for thought, went away. The Countess was unhappy, and she could no longer find amusement in her occupation. It was hateful to hear Margaret's name mixed up with others in such a familiar way. One of a worldly-minded, needy family! — the position was so unsuited to her, free, as she was, from the same faults. Yet there seemed no hope of rescuing her. She must live with them always; share their reputation; bear with their follies; perhaps, at length, learn to imitate them. The Countess meditated sadly upon the lot destined for one whom she loved so truly. What would she not have given for the hope of Margaret as her constant companion!

But it would be impracticable, unless —There was a hope, perhaps not a distant one—If Margaret's faith were changed ; if her own home were under such circumstances to be rendered miserable ; then Beatrice might come forward to her aid. There would be no vow to interpose between her wishes and their accomplishment. All that she possessed might be shared with the friend she loved ; and Margaret might be with her constantly. Now there was always a check upon the Countess's generosity, and her vow was becoming daily more irksome. Father Andrea had not reproved her for this, but he used it to stimulate her efforts for Margaret's conversion; and in her enthusiasm the Countess had at length learnt to overlook every previous or accompanying suffering, and to think only of what she deemed Margaret's most important interests. Beatrice drew a bright picture of happiness for them both, and did not even ask herself whether their home should be in England or in Italy ; but suddenly her face grew paler, her brow contracted with pain, she put her hand to her side, and leant back on the sofa. It was but a spasm ; she had experienced it frequently since the weather became cold ; or perhaps it might only be nervous. Father Andrea came into the room, and she rallied, and addressed him cheerfully ; told him the news from the Grove, and added that Margaret would, if possible, see her that very afternoon ; and then she forced herself to repeat what Lucia had said, observing that whether the facts were true or not, they were equally injurious for Lucia to hear, as they encouraged a criticising, gossiping spirit. Father Andrea looked gloomy ; for, in his last private interview with Lucia, he had reprimanded her more severely than usual, for her uncharitable temper. His words seemed to have been thrown

away, and the penances he had enjoined had been of little avail."

"I really cannot sacrifice my happiness and Margaret's, Father," said the Countess, "to Lucia's fancies. I foresee we shall be compelled to separate."

"Poor girl!" replied the confessor, with an air of compassion.

"Yes, I know it would be very dreadful to her; and it would, on many accounts, be most painful to me; but it must be injurious for her to remain where her jealousy is always fretting; and we may hope that the separation may bring her to a sense of duty. At any rate it would be very hard if Margaret were to suffer for her."

"Very hard, indeed; Miss Percival will soon have sufficient to undergo, without adding to the burden."

"Her father is better," said Beatrice.

"Apparently, for the time; but I hear it is doubtful whether he will ever be as he was before."

"The note does not say so," observed the Countess, opening it again; "it is full of hope."

"Miss Percival is coming to give her own report," replied Father Andrea; "I see her at the shrubbery gate."

The Countess's impulse was instantly to go and meet her; but Father Andrea stopped, and in a tone of command insisted that she should on no account run the risk of cold. He would himself be the first to welcome Miss Percival again at Henningsley.

"You are looking ill, Margaret," said the Countess fondly, as she sat down on a low stool by Margaret's side, when the confessor had left them together. "Yet it is no wonder, considering all you have suffered."

"A short suffering," replied Margaret, forcing herself to smile; "but oh, Beatrice! that dreadful day! I shall never forget it."

"And you are sure it is all over now?" said the Countess; "that there is no more cause for anxiety?"

"We hope not. My father does not regain his strength rapidly; but that is all."

"And your mother, and the children, and your brothers?"

Margaret looked more ill at ease than before, and Beatrice noticed it directly.

"You have too many home cares, Margaret. I would give very much to help you."

"No one can help me," replied Margaret. "Let me try to forget them whilst I am with you."

"Can you do so? yet I would rather share them with you, if I might."

"Dear Beatrice, that is impossible. Many you would not understand, and others I could not tell. I must keep the burden of my own sorrows."

"And I have told you all mine," said the Countess, reproachfully.

"Yes, but how different they are! great and ennobling; mine are of this world. I could not bear to mention them before you."

"And where then is our confidence, Margaret? you once promised me yours."

"I have given it you," replied Margaret. "As far as I myself am concerned, I have told you everything. But where subjects relate to other individuals I must be silent."

"And leave me to gain what I can from hearsay?" answered the Countess, remembering Lucia's information.

"You will not be unjust to me, Beatrice, I know," replied Margaret; "I do not believe it is in your nature; and you would not willingly add to

my wretchedness. Yes," she added, and tears gathered in her eyes, "I may well say it — I am very wretched."

The Countess's manner in a moment recovered its former tenderness. "Margaret, I would not for the world reproach you," she said; "but if there were no mystery, your grief might at least be lightened."

"There is no mystery," replied Margaret, "as regards my present feelings. I have been thinking too much, I believe; my mind is bewildered, and so when trial comes, I am the less able to bear it."

A sudden joy lighted up the Countess's face; but it died away, when she again glanced at Margaret. "Dear child!" she exclaimed in a tone of affectionate compassion; "it must be very sad for you; yet I am thankful that you do think."

"Yes," said Margaret, whilst her voice faltered, "I do, indeed, think. Morning, noon, and night, the idea is before me, in some form; but I cannot feel as, I know, that you would wish. I can doubt, but I can find no certainty. Truth is gone from me — it is nowhere."

"It is but the darkness which precedes the glorious light," said the Countess.

"Or is it the prelude to a still greater darkness? Beatrice, I have never seriously thought that you might be right till within the last few days, and in these there have been fearful, horrible moments! My brain could not stand many such."

"We can both pray," said the Countess, gently.

"Not in those moments," replied Margaret, shuddering at the recollection of her anguish. "There is no power then to help; none, none in heaven or earth. May God in mercy pardon me! but if I am an alien from His Church, how will my prayers be accepted? Beatrice, I was once warned, that there

might be danger in your society. Is it love for you, or for the truth, which bids me doubt?"

"Who but yourself would ask the question?" replied the Countess. "If it were love for me there would be no doubt, my creed would long since have been yours. But truth is almighty, it cannot be resisted."

Margaret buried her face in her hands, without answering.

"Father Andrea will be your best guide, dearest," said the Countess; "let me ask him to come to you."

"In a minute; spare me a little. I am not equal to argument. Are you sure my love for you is not the snare?"

Margaret did not look up, and the Countess knew not how to satisfy her.

"If I might mention your difficulties for you," she said, after a short pause.

"I could scarcely explain them," replied Margaret, raising her head, and speaking more calmly. "They meet me on all sides, and at all times; and again, there is a power impelling me to go forward; urging me even against my will. It tells me that there is no safety where I now am."

The Countess sighed heavily.

"You think so," exclaimed Margaret, "I know you must."

Just then the door opened, and Father Andrea came into the room. He took up a book from the table, and apologized for interrupting them, yet still lingered as if willing to be drawn into conversation.

"Can you not understand our satisfaction in meeting, Father?" said the Countess, with a smile. "The week we have been parted seems an age."

"I can understand a great pleasure in meeting Miss Percival at any time," said the confessor. courteously; "yet I own it would be greater, if I could believe that she had suffered less in the interim."

"My tell-tale face," replied Margaret, striving to speak cheerfully. "As a child, I could never conceal when any thing was the matter."

"Your friends would not wish that you should," said Father Andrea. "They would rather, if they could, assist you to bear your grief."

"I have been seeking to pursuade her of that, Father," observed the Countess, "but I can gain nothing."

"Oh, Beatrice!" exclaimed Margaret, reproachfully, "you do not then value personal confidence?"

"I do not consider it mine," said the Countess. "It should rather be Father Andrea's."

The last words were spoken with hesitation, and the Countess looked at Margaret, to see whether she had gone too far; but there was no change of manner, and no attempt at expostulation. Beatrice rose and left the room; and Father Andrea, advancing to the fire-place, stood for a few moments in thought. He saw that the Countess had a meaning in her action; but he could not discover whether his advice was really desired. Margaret's eyes were bent on the ground, and there did not appear any inclination on her part to begin the conversation.

"The Countess spoke of confidence," he said, at length; "I am the last person who has a right to ask it of you; and yet something in her manner made me think, that, perhaps, I might be of service."

"So far the Countess is right," replied Margaret, in assumed composure, "that you can certainly give me information upon some subjects

which have been a difficulty to me lately; but I would on no account interrupt you, when you are, probably, engaged. Any time will suit me, and my own visit must now be short. We had better defer a conversation for the present."

"Excuse me," replied the confessor, "but, unless at your particular desire, I would on no account allow this opportunity to pass. We are but creatures of the day, Miss Percival, and to-morrow may never be ours."

Margaret was more agitated than she was willing to show. It was not now as when, once before, she had forced herself to be candid with her uncle. Mr. Sutherland's manner was simple and open, and there was no suspicion in her mind that she might be doing wrong; but Father Andrea's sternness was only partially concealed by his marked civility, and as he fixed his searching eye upon her, conscience awoke in her breast, to warn her that she might be doing wrong in consulting him.

"They are abstruse points," she said, finding that the subject could not be avoided, "upon which I was wishing for information. We have touched upon them occasionally; but I still cannot gain any clear idea of the doctrine of the Romish Church concerning them. The Countess referred me to you; but I really am ashamed to ask you to enlighten my ignorance."

Margaret's tone was indifferent; but the confessor was too keen an observer of human nature to be deceived by it.

"All such subjects," he replied, "demand my utmost attention. There cannot be an engagement which I would not, if possible, postpone, to enter upon them; but I am really now perfectly at leisure. Pray let me hear your difficulties."

Margaret felt, as she had before said to the

Countess, that she could scarcely explain them. They were many; and yet they had lately, since she had listened to the conversation of Romanists, become vague. Some plausible arguments in their support, she had already heard, introduced to all appearance, casually, but never in reality, without a meaning, and she did not like to own that they had not been convincing. Father Andrea again pressed for an answer.

"It would give him such pleasure," he said, "to be in any way an assistance to her."

Margaret half reproached herself for cowardice; yet again evading a direct reply, she answered, "that it had not been her intention to trouble him with any discussion on that day; her time was too limited to admit of it; but that on another occasion she might perhaps ask his attention. If he did not think it too exacting, she might write to him."

The confessor's face was for an instant clouded. He trusted more to the eloquence of his conversation than to written arguments, especially as he did not know what secret opponents might be in wait to refute them. He could not, however, decline the proposition, nor urge Margaret to be explicit at once; but his manner involuntarily changed, and Margaret was vexed at perceiving it.

"Do not think me ungrateful," she said, whilst a deep crimson spread itself over her cheek. "The very kindness you have shown me has made me bold in troubling you, when —" she paused, and added less firmly — "when I am unhappy."

Father Andrea slowly repeated the last word: — "unhappy! — and on what account? Yet, pardon me, I would not require an explanation." He held out his hand, which Margaret took, and whilst she almost shrank from the fixedness of his gaze, he added, "Unhappiness, where the salvation of the

soul is concerned, may end in misery by delay." He then left her, and Margaret, sinking into a chair, gave way to a burst of grief. That word delay had struck upon a chord of by-gone days. In a moment—clearly, as if all had passed but yesterday—she stood by her uncle as she had done on the evening after their long conversation at Deering, and heard in tones of the gentlest, most anxious affection, the warning voice, "Margaret, love, this world was not meant for delay." And the hours that followed—the deep thought, and careful self-examination; the hearty resolutions, and fervent prayers; Margaret recalled them all. They had been the fruits of the first warning, what would be the result of the second? A Romanist!—how would Mr. Sutherland bear it? The soft voice of the Countess broke upon her sorrow. "My own Margaret, this is most wretched. Has Father Andrea been no comfort to you?"

"Do not blame me, Beatrice; it may be miserable weakness, but I could not tell him: I will write."

Beatrice looked annoyed; for, like the haughty Viscountess de Lisle, she could pity, but she could not sympathize with weakness.

"Father Andrea is vexed, I know," continued Margaret: "he must think that I am trifling; but my tongue seemed tied, and I was not prepared."

"You will write to him, though," said the Countess, gravely.

"When I can; but, Beatrice, you little know the state of my home at present: it is not peaceful like yours, and my time is not my own for a single hour. I am working without rest for mind or body during the day, and at night I am too weary to collect my thoughts."

"But such a state of things cannot be right," said the Countess.

"It is unavoidable: my mother depends upon me for every thing, and I am bound to exert myself, for she has heavy causes of anxiety."

"And in the mean time the interests of the soul are to be neglected," said Beatrice, in a tone which she did not intend to be reproachful, but which sounded so in Margaret's ears.

"Not quite, I hope," she replied, a little proudly; "I can and must always find leisure for prayer: I could not support the life I do without it; and, Beatrice, I can also find leisure for doubts — miserable doubts."

The suppressed wretchedness with which this was said touched the Countess greatly, whilst it induced her to press still further the necessity of Margaret's taking some steps to satisfy herself. But Margaret would not promise; for she did not like to bind herself, though fully intending to carry out her original idea, and Beatrice was in consequence dissatisfied. The rapid energy of her mind had already carried her to the conclusion that the work was accomplished, and her strength of will could not brook opposition. Margaret saw her disappointment, and it added to her grief. "Strive to have patience with me, Beatrice," she said, humbly. "You have never borne my trial. Let me suit it to my own powers of endurance, or I may sink under it."

She rose to depart, and the Countess, endeavouring to conceal her regret at what appeared to be instability of purpose, made no further mention of Father Andrea. She only begged that if they did not meet she might hear from Margaret every day. A servant would call at the Grove, and she should be anxious to learn Dr. Percival's progress. Of the progress of Margaret's mind the Countess then deemed it advisable to say nothing.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FRESH call upon Margaret's time and thoughts awaited her at home, — a note from Agatha, sent with the carriage which was to take her to Ashington. Colonel Clive was dining out, and Agatha could not be happy unless her sister went to spend the evening with her. Margaret did not hesitate in complying with the request. Her presence she knew might be spared for that one evening. George was at the Grove, having arrived the day previous; Dr. Percival, therefore, would not want a cheerful companion, and indeed George might be almost more useful than herself in amusing his father. Business was out of the question; Dr. Percival could not yet enter into the detail of Craven's affairs; any allusion to them seemed more than he could sustain; but Mrs. Percival had, upon her own responsibility, written to the friend from whom the principal information had been received, announcing her husband's illness, and giving the idea that something might eventually be done to extricate Craven, and entreating that in the mean time, although she would not write to him herself, he might not be driven to extremities by being allowed to think his condition desperate. Margaret did not know whether this was a right mode of proceeding; but it was exactly what she had expected, and she trusted that the sacrifice her father might think it right to make would at last serve its purpose in reclaiming Craven from extravagance, and especially from the gaming-

table. If this were done, no privations would be worthy of a thought.

"I should have seen Agatha myself to-day," said Mrs. Percival, when she was asked to allow Margaret to go to Ashington, "if your father had been well enough to be left. But he has kept me engaged all the afternoon. I am afraid, from what Mr. Harrison says, the baby is not quite well."

"Nothing serious the matter I hope, mamma," replied Margaret, alarmed directly at the prospect of any thing happening which might disturb the only comfort her sister now found in life.

"No, my dear, not serious; but you know babies are always troublesome. Mr. Harrison says that Agatha is fidgetty, which is natural enough. He thinks himself that it is a mere trifle, and he must know best."

"He must know best," said Margaret to herself, as she went to her room; but though she said it, she did not assent to it. Trials seldom or never come alone. Perhaps there was another to be added to those which were already impending over them. Margaret's was not a common love for her sister's child. In its simple innocence and unconsciousness it seemed sent to awaken in its mother's breast a deeper affection than she had yet known; and when Margaret sometimes watched the unwearied fondness with which Agatha hung over her infant, and heard her speak of the nights and days which were spent in its service, without a murmur, she almost reverenced the fragile, helpless little being who had been the means of effecting so great a change. For its own sake she could have cherished it, and for Agatha's she delighted in it; and the only sorrowful thoughts that it ever brought were occasioned by seeing the indifference with which it was regarded by Colonel Clive; then, indeed, Margaret was not

only sad, but indignant. She could allow for the first disappointment of a weak, proud man, whose heart was fixed upon the hope of continuing his estate in the direct line; but she could not overlook the neglect of Agatha, or the cruelty of visiting an appointment of Providence upon his child. Margaret had often experienced a difficulty in being charitable to Colonel Clive; but the difficulty was now tenfold increased; and as Agatha's unhappiness became daily more and more visible, and settled, her voluntary share in her own sufferings was, in her sister's eyes, almost expiated. When alone with her baby Agatha would smile and talk cheerfully; but the distant sound of her husband's step, the mere expectation of seeing him, brought restraint and irritation, and a despondency of manner, which Margaret trembled to see. Such a state of things could not go on always; and what would be the end?

Margaret found Agatha, as she had anticipated, alone; her spirits were worse even than in general. She had been in tears. Margaret inquired the cause, and was taken to the nursery, where the child was lying in its cradle. Agatha pointed to the flushed cheek, and said there was a good deal of fever. Margaret did not see any particular signs of illness; but Agatha was not pleased to receive such comfort. It seemed as if Margaret did not care for her. "It was true," she said, "that Mr. Harrison considered the case trifling; but he had had very little experience with children. If her father could only have seen it, or her mother, even!"

Margaret repeated Mrs. Percival's remark, and Agatha received some satisfaction from finding that a person of experience like hers had taken Mr. Harrison's opinion. "But the thing which made

her anxious," she said, "was, that the child had been drooping for several days."

"We did not hear of it," replied Margaret.

"Indeed I sent you word. But I don't think you have, any of you, been able to attend to other people since my father's illness. I gave several messages and had no answer."

Margaret discovered an absence of placidity in her sister's tone, and did not offer any further opinions about the baby. Dinner was announced, and they sat down together, in the large dining-room, with attendants more than convenience required. The dishes were carried away almost untasted. Agatha professed to have lost her appetite, started at the least sound, fancying her baby might be crying, and turned pale when a servant's voice sounded like the Colonel's; and Margaret, for form's sake, went through the ceremony of eating, and tried to engage her sister in conversation, when a weight like lead was upon her heart, and in her own mind she was reasoning upon some of the doubtful points on which she had postponed consulting Father Andrea.

Agatha went to the nursery again as soon as dinner was over, and Margaret had full leisure for meditation till her sister returned. She endeavoured to read; but reading had lately become a source of disquiet rather than of amusement. When the mind is engrossed by one idea, all subjects are found to bear upon it; and whether it were history, poetry, biography, or fiction, with which Margaret sought to occupy herself, the Romish controversy was still perpetually discovered in all. Coffee was brought and tea made before Agatha re-appeared. Mr. Harrison, she then stated, had called again, according to her request, and persisted in his opinion that there was but little amiss. Mar-

garet hoped Agatha was more comfortable; but Agatha still insisted that Mr. Harrison was not a sufficient authority. She should not have consulted him, had there been any other medical man near. A silence of some minutes followed this observation, when Agatha suddenly exclaimed — "I have thought of one thing. Colonel Clive goes to London next week." Margaret looked up surprised. "I mean," said Agatha, smiling faintly at her sister's wonder, "that I can go too, and we can have advice."

If Margaret's thoughts had been expressed, they would have been pity for a mother's fanciful weakness; but it was too pleasant to witness genuine feeling in Agatha for her to wish to check it. "It will be a good plan," she said, "if the child is not better to-morrow; but I really trust she will be."

Agatha was pleased not to be contradicted, and being relieved by the determination, began to converse more fully upon her father's illness, and Craven's affairs, saying, with a bitterness of manner which she did not strive to repress, that "she was glad the Colonel had never been induced to lend him money. The storm would have fallen upon her now, if he had. Of all things, the Colonel disliked being asked for money."

"Most people do," observed Margaret.

"Ah, yes; but that is quite different. You do not know him, Margaret, and how should you?"

Margaret could not help remembering that her sister's knowledge had been voluntarily acquired; and perhaps Agatha remembered it also, for she heaved a heavy sigh, and passed her hand across her eyes to wipe away a tear. Margaret was standing near her, and stooping down, kissed her forehead. There were many tears now in Agatha's

eyes, and as they fell, she did not try to stop them. To Margaret this was the strangest sight of all. Her cold, proud sister, how much must her spirit have been broken, before such an exhibition of weakness could have been allowed!

"It is only for the baby I care, Margaret," said Agatha. "I could treat him as he deserved, when I alone was concerned; but I cannot—cannot bear his manner now. I will not," she added more firmly; "no woman is called upon to bear it."

"Oh, Agatha!" said Margaret, with great gentleness.

"You are not a wife, Margaret; and it is very well for you to tell me that I must submit. Could you do it yourself?" Margaret left the question unanswered, but, in her own mind, trusted that she should never have put herself in a position to make submission difficult. "There is a home still open to me," continued Agatha. "My father could not refuse to receive me; and I believe—yes, I firmly believe—that Colonel Clive would consent,—and willingly."

Margaret was inexpressibly shocked. She had sometimes endeavoured to imagine what might happen if Agatha and her husband should continue their present wretched life, and the possibility of an ultimate separation had once or twice occurred to her; but it had been instantly rejected as too repugnant to every better feeling to be entertained. Now, to hear the idea voluntarily suggested by the person who was especially bound to be meek and submissive, was altogether revolting, and took from her the power of remonstrance.

"You think, I know, Margaret," continued Agatha, interpreting her sister's silence, "that I can bear more than I do. I wish you were married, and then you would be a better judge."

"I do not wish to judge any one, dear Agatha," replied Margaret; "and no one can feel for you more than I do. But I do not like to talk upon such a subject, seriously. I dare say at times you fancy ——"

Agatha interrupted her in the middle of the sentence. "Hark! surely that was the Colonel's voice?— and only nine o'clock! What can have made him return so early?" Margaret listened. It was the Colonel, speaking to the servant in the harsh dictatorial tones which were natural to him. "Good bye to our quiet evening," said Agatha, "unless he is ill, and will go to bed."

The Colonel's firm tread was not at all "invalidish." Agatha supposed he was wearied with his party, and preferred coming home, to indulge himself in an easy chair and a nap by the fire. She was herself sitting in the chair which he always chose, as being the most comfortable; but she did not think it worth while to move. The Colonel entered, looking gloomy and head-achy. As Agatha had imagined, he had found his party dull; but that was not the reason of his return. "He did not feel well. Dull though it was, it could not be worse out than at home." Margaret asked if he had had tea; Agatha took no notice of him. "One cup of coffee," he said, "he had tasted, but it was not drinkable. No one made good coffee in England."

"Except your servants," observed Margaret, knowing that he piqued himself upon his coffee, which really was remarkably good.

"That is because I taught them how to do it myself. I had Hunter into my room every day for a fortnight, to give him proper instructions."

Agatha was inclined to be satirical, but Margaret said that good coffee was a great treat, and asked if

she might ring the bell for some for him. Colonel Clive was frequently mollified by Margaret's tact, and it might have been a problem whether, under such judicious management, he could not have been metamorphosed into an amiable man. But then, as Agatha had remarked to Margaret, she was not a wife, and the patience of an unmarried relation cannot be a fair criterion of the extent of forbearance which is necessary in order to live peaceably with a husband who requires management. Probably if Margaret had been Mrs. Clive, she would have been as irritated with the Colonel as her sister was.

Margaret was a little curious to know Agatha's thoughts during this time. She leant back in her chair; but she was not asleep, and in general she was not given to meditation. Just, however, as the Colonel was looking round for his own seat, and upon the point of bidding her relinquish it, she started up, saying,—"When do you go to town, Colonel Clive?"

"The week after next, probably."

"Then I shall go with you." The Colonel opened his eyes very wide. "I want advice for baby," continued Agatha; "she is not at all well, and I can not trust Mr. Harrison."

"Ridiculous nonsense!" exclaimed the Colonel: "What fancy will you have next?"

"It is no fancy. The child has been exceedingly feverish and fretful; is so indeed now, and she is quite falling away. In short, I must have an opinion about her."

"'Must' is a very hard word," said the Colonel, and he glanced at the easy chair. Whilst Agatha remained in it, he would not have granted her the merest trifle.

"'Must' is the only right word for a father where

the life of his child is at stake," observed Agatha, pointedly.

"As you please; say what you will: I can have no objection."

"Then I repeat, I must have the opinion of some London physician as to what is the matter."

"If you please," again repeated the Colonel. "As many opinions as you like, only not whilst you are under my roof."

Agatha's eyes flashed fire. Margaret longed to interpose, but dared not. "You see, Margaret, how it is," exclaimed Agatha, appealing to her sister; "you can understand now the cruelty ——"

"The folly!" interrupted the Colonel.

"The cruelty!" again repeated Agatha, in a louder tone. The Colonel rose from his seat, his face burning with indignation; but Agatha's tongue was the more nimble of the two, and she proceeded rapidly: "There is not another man in England who would refuse such a request. In England! no, not in the whole world!"

"Madam!" exclaimed the Colonel, in a voice of thunder. Agatha paused from actual physical nervousness. "Madam! do you know whom you are speaking of? I am your husband!" He walked up to her, and planted himself before her; but Agatha's weakness was only momentary.

"I know that I am speaking of a man destitute of every trace of human feeling," she said, with perfect calmness; and then, turning to Margaret, who stood by, trembling with agitation, she added: "You may tell my mother, Margaret, that if she has any commissions for London, I will execute them. I shall be there in a fortnight's time."

The Colonel shook with rage as he heard this speech. He hesitated, stammered, walked across the room, returned again, and at length uttered an-

other portentous "Madam!" just as Agatha, after a provoking "good night, Margaret, love — kiss my father for me," escaped from his presence.

Margaret waited for an instant to consider what should be done. The Colonel, when in a passion, was not a man to be pacified by gentle words; and, deeming it best to leave him to himself, she went to her sister, to beg that the carriage might be ordered to take her home. Reasoning with Agatha was as useless as with Colonel Clive, and Margaret could not in conscience soothe her. She had in a great measure brought the storm upon herself. Agatha's pride was roused by Margaret's request. She had expected pity, though with the consciousness that she had behaved ill, and that Margaret must think so. A few cutting words were in consequence levelled at her, but Margaret bore them in silence. She went into the nursery to see the baby, and carry home the latest report of it, and then hurried to the carriage to reflect for the next quarter of an hour upon the blessings of a worldly ill-assorted marriage.

CHAPTER XIV.

Dr. Percival's illness was soon discovered to be of a more serious nature than had been anticipated, after he had first rallied from his alarming attack. He made little or no progress in strength, and it could not be concealed that his firmness of mind was much shaken. A short conversation upon business was sufficient to affect him injuriously for several hours; and yet to business he was now obliged to attend.

To extricate Craven from his difficulties — and no other alternative presented itself to the minds of his parents — would require nearly the whole of the sum which still remained of the accumulation of years of labour. Scarcely sufficient would be left to keep up the insurances; and if Dr. Percival were much longer to be incapacitated from exercising his profession, it would be necessary to raise money for the present needs of his family, even at the risk of eventually diminishing the provision which was made for them in case of his death. Such a prospect as this, even to a man in health, would be depressing, but in Dr. Percival's state it was overwhelming. The mind reacted upon the body, and day by day he grew weaker,—more nervous,—more averse to solitude,—more full of foreboding. Mrs. Percival's disposition was hopeful, and she was too energetic to be easily frightened; she had faith in the fortunes of the family. They had gone on well for years, and why should they not continue

to do so? Besides, there was the Colonel, their near connection, rolling in riches. A few thousands to him would be a mere nothing; and of course he would not see his father-in-law in difficulty without coming forward to help him.

Margaret saw the same facts, but did not arrive at the same conclusion. True, they had gone on well for years; but uninterrupted prosperity is not the natural course of human events. Faith in the fortunes of her family she had not, for there was nothing upon which faith could justly be grounded. They had lived for the world, and in the world they had had their reward; and if the evil day were now at hand, it was from the world alone that they could fairly seek assistance. And for Colonel Clive, — Margaret smiled, though it was a bitter smile, when she thought of depending upon him. Her great fear was lest her mother should apply to him directly: but Mrs. Percival had not been in the habit of interfering in money matters; and she went on hoping, and prophesying that Dr. Percival would soon be well. "They must economise for a little while, and when he began his practice again, all would be right. A very few years, with such an income as his, would redeem the past." Margaret wished that Craven could only know all the unhappiness he had caused, for it might do him good.

"Don't wish him that, my dear," said her mother; "depend upon it he is miserable enough. Nothing could be more grateful than his letter this morning."

Margaret owned this, but it did not deter her from writing strongly. She did not regard Craven now as her elder brother. His breach of promise had placed him in a position of inferiority, and she described to him, as vividly as she was able,

the present condition of the family, and the cloud that hung over the future. Craven's reply was more cheering to her than all her mother's prophecies. He said little, but that little was humble, and contained no fervent protestations of amendment. Fine words Margaret never could endure under any circumstances; and when penitence was to be shown, the expressions could scarcely be too concise to suit her taste. It was a monotonous life which Margaret was now leading, — every spare moment devoted to her father's sick room; but if "coming events" do, indeed, "cast their shadows before," it could not be a tranquil one. Hours of silence were no rest, solitude was no relief. If the pressure of family cares seemed from any circumstances to be for a time lessened, there was still the one never-ceasing subject to harass her. Dr. Percival now and then rallied for a day, and in consequence Mrs. Percival was in good spirits; and Mr. Sutherland wrote a better account of himself, and talked of soon returning, — a piece of information which, it seemed, must necessarily be delightful. But still Margaret seldom smiled. She looked thin and worn. Miss Debrett, who noticed it every time she saw her, imagined that she had too much nursing; or else, perhaps, she was fretting about the baby at Ashington; certainly it was not quite what it used to be, and it was very natural that its mother should be anxious; but she did not see why her dear Margaret should take it so much to heart. Poor little thing! if it were to go, it would be released from a world of much sorrow!

Margaret allowed that she was sometimes anxious about the child; but even there the evil lay deeper than the general eye could see. It was Margaret's fate to be behind the scenes in all domestic calamities; to gaze into the depths, whilst the eye of

others rested only upon the surface. Agatha had been compelled, notwithstanding her determination of spirit, to submit to her husband's will. Colonel Clive was not inclined to be fettered by family claims, and irritated by family annoyances during his stay in London. He liked to dine at his club, to indulge himself in the society of men of his own stamp; and to have been obliged to take charge of Agatha and the child would entirely have upset his plans. Agatha, indeed, professed that she intended to be absent only for a week; but the Colonel would not trust to this, and peremptorily insisted that the project should be abandoned.

"Mr. Harrison," he said, "had assured him there was nothing of any consequence amiss with the baby, and it was mere absurdity in Agatha to believe the contrary."

If the Colonel's conscience had been in the least susceptible, he would scarcely have asserted the last fact thus strongly. A few days after Margaret had dined at Ashington, Mr. Harrison's opinion underwent a change. He thought that there was not much the matter at that time, but he expressed some fears for the future; and though Agatha's anxiety magnified these distant fears into serious apprehensions, even Margaret saw that they had a foundation. The child pined away, and the indications of dawning intelligence which had delighted its mother's eye grew fainter. Agatha sometimes sat with it for hours in her lap, but there was no smile or movement; and then, again, apparently without cause, it would seem much better, almost as well as ever. In the midst of these alternations of hope and fear, Colonel Clive set off for London. It was a day of amendment, or Agatha would have been desperate. As it was, she taunted him with the threat that she would follow him; and the Colonel's parting words

were — "Madam, you will do so at your peril." Margaret knew all this; she heard Agatha's lamentations, sometimes witnessed her agony of uneasiness, and yet she could not advise her sister to brave her husband's anger. The case did not seem of that nature to render it a matter of life and death, or even to make it absolutely necessary that a physician's opinion should be called in. Mrs. Percival often laughed at Agatha for being fanciful; and when the mother of eight children laughed, Margaret supposed it must be her own ignorance which made her see alarming symptoms.

Whether the child grew worse or better, however, the effect of her husband's conduct upon Agatha was most mischievous. Her passive aversion, or fretful irritability, was growing into burning indignation. His name was seldom mentioned to any one but Margaret, and to her it was accompanied by such marked contempt and hatred, that Margaret dreaded an allusion to it. It was no marvel, then, that when Miss Debrett spoke of Ashington, or thought that Margaret was anxious, a sigh escaped her, which could never have been drawn forth by the prospect of the release of an innocent baby from the trials of an evil world.

CHAPTER XV.

Father Andrea waited silently, but not always contentedly, after his short interview with Margaret, in the hope of obtaining that acknowledgment of her difficulties which she had almost engaged to make; but he waited in vain. Margaret was too harassed by her home life to be able to devote the time which she would have deemed necessary for such an explanation, even if she had irrevocably determined upon making it. But the determination was now farther off than before. Mr. Sutherland was on his way home, and constantly as Margaret endeavoured to rouse her resolution to the point of a full confession to Father Andrea, so often did the image of her uncle, as of a guardian angel, rise up to check her. It was miserable to doubt, most miserable; it took from her every comfort in religion; it made her hasty and moody; it depressed her spirits by day, and broke her rest at night, until it sometimes seemed almost impossible to bear her present state of existence for another hour. But Father Andrea was in many ways a stranger, Mr. Sutherland was her near relation and true friend; and though Margaret again said to herself, that her uncle's arguments were not likely to satisfy her, that perhaps she might even do wrong in listening to them, still she dreaded his knowing, that with the prospect of so soon seeing him, she had applied for advice to another person, and that other a Romish priest. The

visits to Henningsley were now rare and painful. The Countess was naturally eager to discover the advance which Margaret was making in religious opinions, and Margaret was as naturally unwilling to confess her indecision. This caused a restraint, of which Beatrice often complained, and it was more injurious to the harmony of their friendship than Margaret at all supposed. Having given her affection to the Countess, she gave it unreservedly; and having trusted her, she trusted fully. But Beatrice sought for the devotion of every thought, and a confidence which should have no reserve; and when she did not obtain it, she supposed that the affection must necessarily be imperfect. To add to her annoyance, there was the dread lest Margaret should be wanting in stability of character, and this doubt was even more constantly presenting itself to the Countess, though she tried to turn away from it.

"We shall lose her, father, after all," she said, one day to the confessor, after they had been conversing together upon the subject of Margaret's delay. "Her Protestant friends will take alarm, and our efforts will be ineffectual."

Father Andrea did not reject the idea. He also was evidently disconcerted; but he endeavoured to soothe the Countess by some general observations upon the Wisdom which ordains that we should not succeed too easily in attaining wishes upon which our hearts are fondly fixed. The Countess saw in the remarks an accordance with her own fears, and answered: —

"You are doubtless right, father, with regard to earthly wishes: but ours are higher; and you must let me say, that your regret cannot be like mine."

"Perhaps it is not, my daughter; yet I am open to disappointment, great disappointment."

"And you are disappointed, then?" enquired the Countess.

The confessor was sorry that he had allowed the expression to escape him. It gave a reality to the doubts which Beatrice had not before openly allowed herself to mention.

"We are not justified in expecting perfection, my daughter," he said; "and if we do, disappointment is our proper punishment."

"But Margaret! Margaret to be weak!" exclaimed the Countess, bitterly.

"We must not condemn her hastily," replied the confessor; "and especially we must not think that our will is to be supreme."

"Or rather, I must not think so," said Beatrice, with a smile which had in it more of sadness than of amusement at having read his meaning.

"I speak for myself, also, my daughter. We must learn to bear with the infirmities of our fellow creatures in consideration of our own."

Beatrice turned away without answering. Father Andrea watched her for a few moments, expecting that she would renew the conversation; but he was mistaken. The Countess left him hastily, and almost immediately afterwards he saw her walking in front of the windows with a disturbed step, and seemingly regardless of the keen east wind which was blowing. The confessor's attention under other circumstances might have been directed to the danger to her health, but now his thoughts were given to a different subject — the almost impossibility of entirely uprooting the distinctive characteristics with which all are born. After years of toil and prayer, both in himself and in the Countess, the same spirit of visionary enthusiasm and exacting pride were to be traced, which had in childhood required such a continual check. A prayer

rose to his lips that she might be chastened and directed by a wiser hand than his, and then he returned to his study, without remembering that it was desirable again to seek the Countess and caution her against the inclement weather to which she was exposing herself. The caution would, however, probably have been useless. There was a tumult of anger and vexation in the Countess's breast which must have steeled her against any such warnings, even from Father Andrea. Those few minutes had given vent to a feeling which had for weeks at intervals been gaining strength. If she had been Margaret, if she had loved as Margaret professed to love, and if she had heard the arguments which from time to time had been brought forward in support of the Roman Catholic Church, she was convinced that her whole heart would have turned to it. The religion of her dearest friend, when upheld by such a man as Father Andrea, would have demanded the most searching enquiry. The Countess did not wish Margaret to own herself convinced, but she did expect that she would seek after knowledge; and instead, Margaret appeared lukewarm and uncertain. When at Henningsley, she was often abstracted in manner; and if the subject of religion were introduced, she would sometimes entreat in anguish that it might be dropped. Could the cause be fear? a dread of confessing herself a convert to the truth? Beatrice shrank from the thought, as though a serpent had stung her. Her doubt of Margaret took another form yet not less fatal to her happiness. She had entreated her to consult Father Andrea; but in vain. The will which was a law to all others had no power over the friend she loved. The Countess believed it was her affection which was hurt; but it was her pride also. Yet with the confessor's

warning still fresh in her recollection, in the spirit of the petted, spoilt child, which she had been in her early days, Beatrice took no heed of the duty of self-examination, but dwelt still upon what she believed to be Margaret's weakness.

> "To be wroth with one we love
> Doth work like madness in the brain."

Beatrice was not "wroth," but she was annoyed and suspicious. For nearly half an hour she walked to and fro on the terrace, whilst unjust fancies and chimerical ideas crowded into her mind, to be rejected sometimes as wrong and absurd, at others to be retained with the wretched power of self-tormenting, which wounded affection or esteem so peculiarly possesses. The sharp piercing wind was felt by her, but not regarded; in her present excited temperament it was a refreshment rather than not. She was suddenly stopped, however, by a remonstrating voice. Lucia appeared at the other end of the garden. She had been with Mrs. St. Aubyn for a drive, and was just returned. The presence of the young Italian had seldom been more unwelcome to the Countess, and she did not at first take any notice of the expressions of rather exaggerated horror at her imprudence in venturing out on such a day. Lucia, however, was not to be baffled. She came up, breathless with haste, and began an eager entreaty that the Countess would instantly go in. Beatrice smiled, though slightly, and professing to have no idea that the wind could do her harm, continued leaning over the balustrade. Lucia had lately seen several of these moods, and sometimes repaid them in the same way; but now her real anxiety overcame any petty annoyance, and she exclaimed: —

"Then walk, pray walk, Signora, if you will not

listen to me in any thing else. It must be very bad for you to be standing still."

"It cannot signify," said the Countess, abruptly; yet she obeyed Lucia's bidding, and moved on.

Lucia followed, and nothing was said for some moments. It was a hateful silence to Lucia, for she believed that the Countess must be thinking of Margaret.

"Where did Mrs. St. Aubyn take you?" enquired Beatrice at length, forcing herself to say something to her companion.

"Merely into the town, and to Ashington. She wished to enquire for Mrs. Clive's baby."

"Is it ill?"

"More than ill; they fear that it will not outlive the night."

The Countess was much shocked. She was naturally too unselfish to be in any case engrossed with herself, when made acquainted with the sorrows of others. "Poor Mrs. Clive!" she said; and then, in a lower tone, she added—"and Margaret loved it so much!"

"Miss Percival was just driving up as we came away," said Lucia. "She was looking ill."

The Countess was sorry, but not surprised to hear it. In Margaret's present state of mind, she knew that suffering was unavoidable.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn says that she hopes to see Miss Percival more cheerful soon," continued Lucia. "She is expecting an uncle home, whom she is very fond of."

"An uncle! what uncle?" enquired the Countess quickly.

"Oh, Signora, how strange! Surely you know. He is a clergyman."

"Yes, I remember. I have heard."

But Beatrice could not know much, for Margaret

had said almost as little of Mr. Sutherland to her, as she had of the Countess to Mr. Sutherland.

"He is to be in England very soon indeed, I believe," said Lucia. "But, Signora, I should have imagined that you were better acquainted with this than any one."

She glanced enquiringly at the Countess, who did not perceive the rather sarcastic expression. Her thoughts were differently directed. Margaret expecting her uncle! Then no marvel that she refused to apply to Father Andrea. But why had she not said so? why had she gone on raising false expectations? There was a disingenuousness in such conduct, which Beatrice could little brook at any time, still less in her present humour.

"Miss Percival's uncle, Mr. Sutherland, will find much alteration since he went away," observed Lucia, determined to pursue the subject till she could discover to what degree the Countess was interested in the family, as well as in Margaret. "Mrs. St. Aubyn says that Dr. Percival is really seriously ill: she does not know whether they are aware of it, but Mr. Harrison thinks badly of him; and Mrs. Clive is half frantic about her baby; and if any thing were to happen to Dr. Percival, Mrs. St. Aubyn fears it will be very bad for the family. The son in the army has been frightfully extravagant, and there are a great many to be provided for."

This was rather a medley of misfortunes, according to Lucia's usual habit of mixing up all she heard, and detailing it without an attempt at order; but it was sufficient to give the Countess a sad impression of Margaret's causes for unhappiness, and of her own unkindness.

"And Margaret was looking ill?" she asked, be-

traying the current of her own thoughts rather than replying to Lucia.

"Yes, Mrs. St. Aubyn declares she never knew any one so changed. It must be a miserable thing to belong to such a family."

Beatrice walked forward rapidly a few steps, as if trying to control her indignation; then, turning round quietly, she said:

"Lucia, that is an observation which I have before requested may not be made in my presence."

"As you please, Signora;" but Lucia's knitted brow showed that the reproof did not please her. "I can have but one wish in ever mentioning the name of Percival."

"Not to give me pleasure," said the Countess.

"To give you truth, Signora;—a truth which you will never learn whilst living as you now do."

"Lucia," replied Beatrice, with great composure, "you forget the respect which is due to me and to my friends; I advise you to recollect yourself for the future."

"Recollect!"—the flashing eyes of the Italian girl kindled with indignation, and, with an eager gesticulation, she added, "Signora, there is no need to bid me recollect. I have, of late, sufficiently learnt to remember my state of dependence."

"The lesson has not been taught you willingly on my part, Lucia," replied the Countess: "I desire only your good, and I would have made you happy as my younger sister if you had consented to it;—but you have marred your own peace — and mine."

"Yours!—yours!—Signora! Say it—no, you cannot say it," exclaimed Lucia, impetuously; "you, the queen, the idol, the worshipped ——"

"To be worshipped is not happiness, Lucia," replied Beatrice.

"But to be loved is," said Lucia, in a tone of

wretchedness,—" and would that I had never known it!"

The Countess paused at the hall door.

"I am not going to continue this conversation, Lucia," she said; "it is undesirable for us both. If you have complaints to make of my conduct, let them be communicated to Father Andrea, and immediately: he leaves us to-morrow for London, and I wish to have no recurrence of this language in his absence."

Lucia stood for an instant, motionless; but as the Countess was about to enter the house she caught her dress. "One moment," she said, in a voice not one accent of which faltered, although it was strained and hollow:—"Signora, I have marred your peace. It matters not whether your words were true,—you have said it. I will go — back." The veins in her forehead swelled with intensity of agitation, and with repressed bitterness breaking forth, she added, vehemently, "and leave you to the love of an English heretic!"

The Countess would have detained her; but she was gone. Her light step was scarcely heard as she rushed up the broad staircase, and in a moment she had passed along the gallery, and the quick closing of a door echoed loudly and drearily through the almost deserted mansion.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lucia had reason for saying that Margaret was looking ill. The last night had been a night of watchfulness by Dr. Percival's sick bed, and, after a few hours of unrefreshing sleep, she had risen to the duties of the day, miserable, anxious, and irritable. For Margaret could not now calm her troubled spirit by prayer; she could not now kneel before a Father's throne, and find rest in the consciousness of His presence; she could not turn from the din and tumult, and care of life, to the peacefulness of that eternal home where "the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest." Perplexity, controversy, followed her in her hours of devotion, and the petition which rose to her lips too often wandered off into speculative doubts as to doctrine, or questions of casuistry as to conduct. Then came the business of the day, upon such a state of mind,—so unprepared,—so unchastened; and Margaret's temper gave way under the trial; her manner became capricious, her words were hasty, and her decisions often ill-judged and unjust. No one could be more sensible of this change than Margaret herself, and no one could be less willing to excuse it. She blamed herself, resolved, often tried sincerely, but the faults were repeated. No longer able to govern herself, she looked round for some other guide. Increased self-denial she fancied might be of service; and Margaret gave up her usual gratifications, and cut short even her ordinary

recreations; but her mind grew more bewildered, more excitable. The remedies themselves proved a snare to her; for they were self-imposed, and sometimes neglected, and often seen to be of doubtful efficacy. The Countess and Father Andrea were now constantly in her mind, and the sense of personal infirmity was a greater temptation to be unreserved with the latter than any speculative doubts. For in the Romish Church (she said to herself) some one would always be at hand to aid her in her difficulties. Confession would be her rest and refuge, and absolution would restore the peace which was lost. And in such a case as hers, the assistance of another and a wiser counsellor was undoubtedly needed. But if Margaret had made herself thoroughly acquainted with her Prayer Book, she would not have been so hasty in casting reflections upon the Church into which she was baptized, under the idea that needs like hers had been overlooked, and left without provision. She would have found in the first exhortation in the Communion Service a direction given to those who have griefs to be opened, and consciences to be quieted, and scruples and doubtfulness to be avoided, to apply to the minister of their parish, or to some other clergyman, that they "may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice;" and whatever might be the difficulties in the way of others from the obstacles interposed by long neglect of the practice, in her own case both the duty and the opportunity of following the direction of the Church were clear. She might naturally have been averse from applying to Mr. Stanley, fearing to find no sympathy, and distrusting his judgment; but in her uncle a guide had been given her to whom she might have recourse without hesitation. Yet Margaret voluntarily turned away from him,

and was in her heart seeking for another in a foreign communion. It may be doubted also whether she would have been contented with the use of confession, as encouraged and recommended by the English Church. What she required, or fancied she required, was, besides minute instructions in the conduct of daily life, a constantly repeated assurance of forgiveness which should completely remove the burden of self-reproach.

Margaret might have learnt a lesson upon this subject from her own conduct with the children. On this morning, before leaving her room, it occurred to her that she had forgotten on the previous evening to examine Harriet's book of confessions. This was always required; for Harriet's tender conscience could not rest in self-examination, without that which stood to her in lieu of absolution — Margaret's inspection and knowledge. She always entreated that her sister would look at her book; and if it seemed likely that the request would be forgotten, wrote it on a slip of paper, that Margaret might see it when she went to her room. Margaret was pleased with this at first, for it was candid and simple-minded, and gave her, she thought, an insight into the child's mind; but lately she had begun to doubt. She opened the book now, and read, "Wasted my time before school — left my books about — was cross to Grace — did not try to practice properly;" and other faults of the same kind; trifling, but likely to grow into bad habits. Margaret turned back a few pages, and read the same again and again; yet some nights before she had had a long conversation with Harriet, and urged her to be more careful, and had even brought tears of penitence. How was it that the goodness evaporated so quickly? Margaret went down stairs, having made a strict resolution to be

patient, and found Harriet alone in the school-room. Grace and Philip had learnt their lessons, and were gone into the garden to play. Harriet was not quite perfect in hers, and remained to look at them. Margaret asked, rather angrily, "How this could be? She had had sufficient time. It was evident that she had been wasting it." Harriet was humble and silent, and Margaret continued: "I hoped, Harriet, that you would have improved before this. You told me the other night that you were very sorry."

"And I was sorry," said Harriet, earnestly; "but I forget."

"My dear child," replied Margaret, striving not to show any irritability, "is that an excuse? Do you not think I must be very much vexed to find that you are as inattentive as ever? I wonder whether you ever look over the book you write in at night, and see how long the same faults have been going on."

"You see it, don't you?" asked Harriet, quickly.

"Yes; but what good can that be? They are your faults, not mine."

"And won't you forgive them?" said Harriet.

"Yes, of course I will, when you are really sorry, and try to do better; but to tell me of them is no use without that."

"Then you don't really forgive?" said Harriet, in an anxious tone; "I always thought you did."

Margaret was perplexed for a reply. The pardon must necessarily be conditional; but this would not satisfy the child. "My forgiveness is not the important thing," she said, gravely. "If you were quite sure of it, you ought not to be satisfied, unless you could hope that God would forgive you likewise."

"But when you are not angry, then I think that

God is not," said Harriet, whilst her manner grew more reverent.

"And that is the reason you like me to look at your book?"

"Yes, and you are never cross."

"I could not be cross, as you call it, when you come to me to confess your faults; but if, because you confess, you think you may forget, and go away happy, the confession will do you more harm than good. We will try now, without my looking. You shall write down your faults still, but I will not see them. Whose forgiveness then must you seek?"

"God's," replied Harriet, in a tone which showed awe and some distress of mind.

"And He will know whether you are in earnest, and exactly how much you endeavour to improve," continued Margaret. "We cannot deceive Him."

"I did not mean to deceive you," said Harriet, with something of reproach in her voice.

"I am quite sure that you did not, my love; but you deceived yourself. The reason you liked me to see your book was, not that I might help you to overcome your faults, because if that had been the motive you would have tried a great deal more by yourself; but you disliked having them upon your mind."

"Then you will never know any thing," said Harriet.

"Yes indeed, my dear; whatever you wish to tell me at any time; but not regularly. You know I always like to listen to you, and all that I want is for you to try and please God, and think of Him more than of me. I may die, or go away; a great many things may happen to prevent me from being with you, but still you will be bound to love and serve Him."

Harriet became very thoughtful, and Margaret saw that the thoughtfulness continued. She was sorry that she had in any way laid a burden upon the child's mind, but she had little doubt of having acted wisely. However advisable it might be to win her confidence, it would not do to sacrifice the principle of personal responsibility to God. Margaret followed unconsciously the system of the English Church; but in her own case she preferred the practice of Rome. Priestly absolution, where the conscience is charged with some particular offence, was not all that she needed. She wished to escape from herself, and after receiving pardon for the past, she would have thrown herself entirely under the direction of another person. Margaret desired to rid herself of the burden, and the conflict which God has imposed upon every human being; but could she in fact be justified in putting aside her own judgment and conscience? She might act by the advice of a confessor; yet, if her actions were unwise, she would surely suffer from them; and if they were sinful, she would surely be punished for them. Reason told her this; but reason was not listened to. In her state of wretchedness, Margaret was ruled by feeling, and this led her at last to determine upon applying to Father Andrea without farther delay. With regard to confession and absolution, Mr. Sutherland she knew would not give her what she required. He would probably advise her as to her conduct, and warn her to receive with greater faith the absolution pronounced by the Church in the service of the Holy Communion. He might even allow that the practice of confession was, under limitation, very desirable. She had often heard him say this; but he was not likely to allow her to put herself entirely into his hands. Margaret did not see any analogy between her own feelings and those of her little sister;

in fact she was too unhappy to think about it; and after a fretful morning in the school-room, miserable at having broken her sincere resolutions, she at length decided upon beginning the letter which was to explain some of her principal difficulties to Father Andrea. By this means she should at least be fully satisfied as to the claims of a Church which promised all the assistance she desired in her daily conduct.

Thus at the precise time when the Countess Novera was judging hardly of an apparent hesitation and lukewarmness, Margaret's mind was brought to that very point which Beatrice most desired. The step was one involving consequences of too great importance to enable Margaret to meet with composure any one connected with Henningsley; and her agitation was but ill-concealed when she passed Lucia and Mrs. St. Aubyn at the lodge-gate at Ashington.

Once, however, within the house, her thoughts were quite diverted from herself. The baby had been taken worse, Agatha was hopeless, servants were rushing in all directions, for they scarcely knew what; Mr. Harrison had been called in, but still persisted that there was no "immediate" danger. Agatha languidly repeated the word "immediate," and fell back almost fainting. Margaret roused her utmost energy for the occasion; but it was not what it used to be, — the support which she once could have found in religion was gone. She endeavoured a little to console Agatha; but what she said was mechanical, and she soon relapsed into silence. Mrs. Percival was sent for, and came directly, and Margaret was then obliged to return to her father. She would fain have remained; but her presence could not be as useful as her mother's, and Agatha did not press it. She did not indeed press any thing. Her eyes were vacant, and she moved

slowly, as if in a stupor. Margaret kissed her at parting; but the kiss was not returned. Agatha had no thought now but of her dying child. It was dying, notwithstanding the hopeful prophecies that it would recover. Margaret looked upon the unconscious infant as it lay in its nurse's arms, and felt assured that she was gazing upon it living, for the last time. Her tears fell upon the soft pallid little cheek; but they were not tears of regret, — rather, they were tears of envy for the prospect of its early happiness.

Late at night Mrs. Percival returned from Ashington. The child had been sleeping, and Agatha had acknowledged a ray of hope, and consented to be left. Margaret saw that her mother was worn out with fatigue, and insisted upon her taking rest. "She herself would lie down on the sofa in her father's room," she said, "in case any thing might be wanted."

Mrs. Percival agreed, and Margaret lay down in the hope of sleeping. But sleep did not come at her bidding. Her father was still, and apparently comfortable; there was not a sound to be heard; nothing to disturb or outwardly to distress her; but the long hours of the night seemed as if they would never end, whilst Margaret tossed from side to side, and mentally from care to care, without one resting-place for her doubting, distracting thoughts. The morning dawned, and Margaret rose, and looked out of the window towards Henningsley. The hill above the house could just be seen to the left, and her eye rested upon it fondly but sadly. She was experiencing now what her uncle had once warned her would be the case in an unequal friendship. The Countess was not unacquainted with her trials, but, moving in a different sphere, she could not really understand and participate in them. The

thought added to her desolateness, but it did not diminish her affection; it seemed rather to elevate it. Beatrice appeared a being removed from the common accidents of mortality, and Margaret's love became more a species of adoration, as the present circumstances of her life seemed to raise a barrier between them. For a passing moment an often-indulged vision of happiness again came before her. To live with the Countess, to be her solace and companion, to be one with her in faith as well as in feeling,—it seemed that this would be Paradise upon earth. But a rumbling sound struck upon Margaret's ear. That slight noise recalled her imagination to her true situation, to the struggle which lay before her, let the affairs of her family, or her own final convictions in religion, be what they might.

It was the rattle of carriage wheels which had attracted Margaret's notice. She thought it unusual at that early hour, and remained at the window to watch what might be going by. As the carriage turned a corner of the road, Margaret saw that it was Colonel Clive's. She stood still, but her limbs trembled. She was certain that sorrow was at hand. The carriage stopped at the gate without driving up to the house. Margaret thought of her father and mother, and feared they would be disturbed. She determined to go herself and unbar the door, for it was so early that none of the servants were stirring. With a noiseless footstep she stole from the room. The heavy locks and bolts were almost beyond her strength, and the peal of the bell had summoned the household before the door could be opened. Margaret threw it back, expecting to see a servant and receive a message. Agatha was there, ghastly pale, with her dress disordered, her hair hanging carelessly about her face.

She returned no answer to Margaret's hurried questions, but made her way into the hall.

"For pity's sake speak, Agatha," said Margaret. Still there was no reply. Agatha ascended the staircase, and Margaret followed. There was an expression in Agatha's countenance which made the blood curdle in her veins. With even steps Agatha proceeded along the passage to the door of her own chamber, the room which for so many years she had occupied peacefully and happily. Then pausing, she said in a voice awfully calm, whilst she fixed her unnaturally bright eye upon her sister, "Margaret, I am come home.—I have no child."

A cry of anguish escaped from Margaret's lips; but the unhappy mother stood by without shedding a tear, whilst the words "home — I am come home"—were uttered again, as if unconsciously. Margaret yielded to her own sorrow but for a moment. She threw her arm round her sister's neck, and said, "Agatha, dearest, it cannot suffer now."

Agatha's eye wandered vacantly round the room.

"We will return together," continued Margaret, and she gently tried to lead her away; but Agatha resisted the endeavour. She stood fixed in the centre of the room, her countenance becoming more and more rigid. Margaret trembled. That still, stern face of beauty seemed full of horror. "Agatha," she said, assuming a tone of command, "it is your duty to return. It is the will of God that your child should die."

They were words of seeming severity, but they startled Agatha from her trance. She staggered across the room, exclaiming, "It is his doing — he murdered it," and sank senseless upon the bed.

CHAPTER XVII.

Two miserable days followed that terrible morning. At the expiration of them, Agatha stood by the side of her child's coffin, and wept most bitter tears; but Margaret trusted that they were blest, for they were the tears of nature. She could however little hope that things would again return to their natural course, for there was one subject which Agatha would not suffer to be approached. Colonel Clive was expected at Ashington, and his wife would not remain to meet him. Mrs. Percival, shocked at the discovery which she now made of the state of feeling between her daughter and her husband, was inclined to follow the dictates of an indulgent partiality, and urged that Agatha might return to the Grove for the present, and trust to time and mild arguments to restore unanimity. Dr. Percival was too ill to be consulted, for every thing which excited his mind increased his fever. Margaret's judgment therefore was alone to be depended upon; but though it was reasonable and unwavering, it was without effect. It was in vain that she spoke of the sin of overlooking a wife's promise and duty; of the consideration due to a father's feelings; of the censure of the world, and the almost certainty that if, at such a moment, the breach were widened, it could never again be repaired. Agatha was, as she always had been, invulnerable to reason when her will was determined. "She would not be dependent upon a mother's kindness," she said, "if that mother were unwilling to receive her. She would

retire to a lodging in Staunton, Deering, Eastlake, any where, the whole world was now alike ; but she would not meet the man whose barbarity had caused the death of his child."

Margaret's heart revolted from such a step. Before the marriage, she would thankfully have made the sacrifice of her dearest personal interests to save her sister from a life of wretchedness; now, she would as thankfully have made an equal sacrifice to induce her to submit to the fate which was the result of her own deliberate act. Yet when Agatha persisted in her resolution, only one course could be adopted. The shelter of her father's house could alone give a pretext for such conduct, and Margaret found a slight satisfaction in the hope that distress of mind might by the world be considered a plausible excuse, and that before long the inveteracy of her sister's feelings might be subdued.

The world, however, is in such cases peculiarly clear-sighted; and even were it not so, Colonel Clive was not a man to conceal his wrongs. He returned to his home shocked, if not very much grieved, at the loss of his child ; and his sentiments towards Agatha softened by discovering that her anxiety had not been really unfounded. If, at any period since the first disagreement, it would have been possible to produce a cordial feeling on his side, this was the one. But he found his house deserted, his servants looking mysterious, and no voice of kindness to mitigate the self-reproach, which, notwithstanding his long habits of indulgence, pressed upon his conscience. Margaret had entreated that a note at least might be left for him, explaining that Agatha had gone to her father's house only during the first paroxysm of grief, and leaving an opening for a return, if the Colonel expressed any wish to see her; but Agatha could

perceive no good, she said, in such half measures: return to him, she never would, and why then should she hold out any hopes? The causes of Margaret's distress were incomprehensible both to her sister and Mrs. Percival. The latter, indeed, thought it very dreadful that the Colonel should have so deceived them as to his character, and grieved sorely over the inevitable loss of position which must be the consequence of any real separation; but the case was not an uncommon one; the Colonel would be bound in honour to make Agatha a handsome allowance; and, if they were not happy together, he doubtless would do so for the sake of peace. Margaret was not open to any considerations of this nature. Agatha's action was in her eyes sinful: as such there could be consolation only in repentance and amendment; and when she heard that both the Colonel and Mrs. St. Aubyn had expressed their indignation not only at Agatha, but her whole family, she felt humiliation, but no bitterness in return. The true state of the affair was kept from Dr. Percival as much as possible; but he soon suspected that something was very much amiss. His questions and surmises were peculiarly harassing to Margaret, and she would willingly have told him every thing, and begged for his interference, or at least advice; but Mrs. Percival would not hear of it. The reason she gave was, that it would excite him too much; but the real reason, though unacknowledged, was the dread of his displeasure. Dr. Percival was a straightforward, punctilious, — his wife called him, a crotchety man. He had strong ideas of the duty of a wife's submission, and would have been pained beyond expression at the strictures which justly might be passed upon Agatha's conduct. As long as the truth could be kept from him Mrs. Percival determined that it

should be. Agatha was naturally cautious, and in her short interviews with her father, took care to speak of her stay merely as temporary. Margaret avoided the subject as much as possible, and Mrs. Percival, whenever it was alluded to, purposely wandered off into lamentations over the shock which Agatha had received, and the necessity of a mother's eye to watch over her health.

Miss Debrett was the person whom Mrs. Percival most dreaded. To her simple mind it was perfectly unaccountable, that at a season of such family distress the Colonel and dear Agatha should choose to be apart. If Agatha were really ill, and of that there was no doubt, it was very right that she should be under her mother's roof; but then, why was not the Colonel there too? Why was it that every one at the Grove looked so awkward when his name was mentioned? Why was Mrs. St. Aubyn's carriage never seen at the gate? What could it all mean? Miss Debrett was a yet more frequent visitor at the Grove now that Dr. Percival was ill. She made it a point of duty to know every day exactly how he had slept, and now and then she was admitted to see him. She was no companion, but she contrived to amuse him for a little while; and in pain and weakness, and great mental anxiety, even a momentary diversion of the thoughts is a blessing. "Your father and I were putting our heads together, yesterday, my dear," she said one morning to Margaret, "to find out what is the matter with Mrs. St. Aubyn. Your father says she has not been once to enquire after him for several days, and she used to send regularly, I know; I watched the servant go by my window exactly at eleven o'clock."

Margaret would fain have professed ignorance; but this her conscience did not allow; and she

answered, "that Mrs. St. Aubyn often took fancies in her head."

"But such a strange one this, my love, so entirely unaccountable! And people talk so much about it."

"Do they?" enquired Margaret, with some anxiety.

"Yes, indeed they do. It was only yesterday I met Mr. Stanley, and he asked me what was the cause of the coolness, and whether it was true about the Colonel and Agatha."

"True! what?" asked Margaret.

Miss Debrett's eye was more penetrating than usual, for it was quickened by affection. "My dear," she said, "I suspect there is nothing new to you in what people say. I wish there might be."

"But you have not told me what you have heard," replied Margaret, wishing to avoid the conversation, and at the same time desirous to learn the state of public opinion.

"As to that," replied Miss Debrett, "I have been thinking of it a great deal; and I came over here hoping I should have a nice little quiet chat with your father about it; but Symonds tells me he is not so well, poor man!"

"He had a very disturbed night," replied Margaret, "and I don't think he will be equal to talking to you to-day."

"I am so very sorry, my dear. What does Mr. Harrison say?"

"He tells us he must be kept quite quiet," replied Margaret; "and that is difficult."

"Yes, to be sure! with all his patients wishing to see him, and no doubt coming to ask after him. But I have heard that Dr. Hastings of Eastlake is going to settle in Staunton, and I dare say he will help a little till your father is well enough to be about again."

Margaret had heard the same intelligence, and had drawn an unpleasant conclusion from it. It was to her a symptom of the near approach of the storm which was gathering over the family. A few months ago the idea of a new physician settling in Staunton would have been almost ludicrous.

"Well, they are hard times!" sighed Miss Debrett. I should very much have enjoyed a gossip with your poor father this morning; but since it can't be, you must tell me instead. Just sit down quietly for a minute, if you can, and let me know a little about it."

Margaret excused herself from sitting down, on the plea of being wanted by the children, and proposed that Miss Debrett should wait to see her mother. But Miss Debrett's strong point was curiosity, and upon the eve of its being satisfied, she did not like the notion of delay.

"Only one minute, my love," she said. "It seems strange, you know, for me to be the only person ignorant, intimate as I am with you all; and that young Italian girl with Mrs. St. Aubyn knowing every thing, I am certain."

Margaret suffered under a mixed feeling. Her pride was hurt at the notion of her family affairs being made the subject of general conversation, and Lucia was too nearly connected with the Countess Novera to allow any opinion, which she might form, to be a matter of indifference.

"What do you mean," she said, "by thinking that Lucia Fontana knows every thing?"

"Why, my dear, only this; that Mrs. St. Aubyn and that young lady, I never remember her name, called on me yesterday, and somehow, one never can tell how those things happen, we began talking about all of you, and I could not help re-

marking that the Italian girl was quite alive the moment your name was mentioned."

"But who spoke of us first?" enquired Margaret.

"Why, I did, my dear. I meant nothing wrong; and you know it was natural, being fond of you all, that I should talk about you. But Mrs. St. Aubyn drew up very stately, and said something about a painful subject, and dreadful disappointment, and her poor brother, and looked at the Italian girl just as if she was her intimate friend; and then she drew up too, and sighed. I hope there was no harm in it; but I thought, at the time, it seemed strange for such a young thing to sigh about the concerns of strangers. Mrs. St. Aubyn and she got up directly, in a great hurry, and said they must go.—But Margaret, my love, you seem to take it quite to heart."

Margaret did not know that she had shown it, but she did feel mentally very uncomfortable. The Countess must hear every thing from Lucia, whilst she had been almost silent. Not that Margaret had not thought of, and written to Beatrice. Every hour, as it went by, brought some recollection of the friend she best loved, and each day had been brightened by the hope of meeting; and when that was found to be impracticable, the disappointment was softened, as much as it could be, by notes. Margaret wrote of herself more confidentially and freely, for she had acknowledged her intention of seeking an explanation with Father Andrea, as soon as he should return from London, where he had been absent some little time. Religion was now the chief topic of their communications. Margaret even sought to forestall Father Andrea's advice, and frequently, in the few hasty lines which were all for which she could find leisure, sent a query of

difficulty, to which Beatrice was to reply herself. Of the private anxieties of the family she said as little as possible; for pecuniary difficulties she knew ought to be kept secret until the last moment, and Agatha's conduct would be as repugnant to the Countess's principles as to her own. If it could be concealed, and a re-union effected, Margaret felt that much humiliation would be spared her; but in this short conversation with Miss Debrett, her hope upon this point was destroyed. Lucia Fontana, as the confidante of Mrs. St. Aubyn, would hear all the particulars, exaggerated by personal resentment. The Countess would know, not merely that differences existed between Agatha and Colonel Clive, but that the former had actually left her husband's roof at the moment when every sentiment of duty ought to have induced her to remain; and that she was now domesticated with her own family, leaving the Colonel to the desolate solitude of his childless home.

Margaret herself could make excuses for Agatha, knowing what she had suffered; but it was not likely that the Countess would; and how would she interpret the silence which had been observed upon the subject? Margaret blamed herself for short-sightedness. She might have known from the beginning that such a step as Agatha had taken must excite public observation, and she ought to have anticipated any false reports which might arise, by speaking openly. Now she feared it was too late. Margaret was sure that she might explain every thing so as to exonerate herself from having in the least sanctioned her sister's behaviour; but she was jealous for the honour of her family, and she knew that the delicacy of feeling which the Countess had inherited from her mother, and had preserved unimpaired amidst the temptations of worldly

society, would be shocked by such conduct. And Beatrice was exacting in her affection; that, Margaret had long since perceived. She might be annoyed, and not without cause, that any thing should have been withheld. The charge of want of confidence could not be easily repelled; and yet, whilst Margaret was vexed and uneasy, she was still unwilling to say more upon the subject of Agatha's misconduct than was absolutely necessary. Her respect, even reverence for the Countess, made her proud with regard to her own relations.

Miss Debrett watched the changes of Margaret's countenance with a misgiving that she had said or done something wrong; or, at least, that there was a greater misunderstanding between Agatha and Colonel Clive than Margaret chose to acknowledge. She grew a little fretful as Margaret, after standing in a reverie, was going to leave the room, and called after her in a complaining tone,—"Well, Margaret, am I not to see your father, or to know any thing about any of you?"

Margaret was aware directly of the apparent unkindness, and returned to devote a few more of her precious minutes to her impatient friend. She could not escape now from the acknowledgment that all was not quite right at Ashington. "Agatha had had a good deal to try her, and the Colonel was rather hasty, and for the time it was thought better that Agatha should stay at the Grove." More than this Margaret would not own, and dexterously baffled Miss Debrett's surmises; warning her, at the same time, not to hint the subject to Dr. Percival, as it was, of course, very disagreeable to him, and would be likely to do him harm. This was a sufficient argument for Miss Debrett; she promised silence and caution, and only hoped that her dear Margaret would make a point of telling her exactly

how things were going on. It frightened her to hear people talk. What with the reports about Agatha, and something Mrs. Prior had said of the reason why Craven did not come to see his father, she had been quite ill.

"I don't believe all I hear, my dear," she added; "and I told Mrs. Prior that she must be mistaken about Craven. It is not in your way, any of you, to be extravagant; and then Mr. Prior came in, and looked quite angry at her for supposing such a thing, and said, 'Nonsense, and gossip,' and so she drew back. But it made me nervous for the time. However, there is one thing which will set all right again. Mr. Sutherland will be here next week."

How easily and ignorantly our friends settle our affairs for us! It was Margaret's thought when Miss Debrett was gone, and she sought the solitude of her own chamber. Mr. Sutherland's return set all right! The very mention of it made her heart throb with anguish, whilst, leaning her aching head upon the table, she found relief in tears. Yes, it was for him she grieved when the misery of doubt oppressed her. It was not for the possibility of being compelled to sever a sacred tie; for the absence of the reverence and love with which we should cling to the Church of our fathers. Margaret had never really loved the English Church, and even whilst obeying, she had criticised and speculated. She had given her outward respect to one communion, her inward admiration to another; and now, when she began to dwell, as she did dwell more and more every day, upon the question, whether conscience would not call upon her to profess a change of faith, she had few regrets except for the suffering in which such an act must involve the friends she loved.

This, indeed, was sufficiently terrible. It was enough to haunt her with thoughts of wretchedness by night and day; to make her daily life a burden, and at times to absorb every other anxiety; but was it the grief which ought to have been uppermost? was it natural, was it safe, to have little or no sorrow and compunction at the idea of leaving the Church in which she had been baptized and brought up? Was not such indifference in itself a reasonable ground for doubting whether some personal likings or dislikings did not bias her judgment? If she had ever been a loyal and devoted member of the Church, could she, with so little suffering to herself, contemplate breaking the ties which bound her to it? and if never loyal and devoted, could she be a fit judge of the claims it had upon her allegiance? Margaret, however, thought nothing of all this. Regrets, indeed, she had, but they were for the possible necessity of separation from friends, not for the abandonment of all which she had been taught hitherto to regard as sacred.

And now, to add to her many cares, came the dread of the opinion which the Countess Novera might form from Lucia's representations. If aught occurred to interrupt or diminish the affection of Beatrice, it seemed as if Margaret's last hope of happiness would be gone. With the comfort of her home broken up; the prospect of her father's increasing illness,—perhaps his death; the idea of the privation, even poverty, which might follow; the doubts which took from her all consolation in religion; and the dread of the pain she must inflict upon her parents and her uncle, by acknowledging the state of her mind,—her cup of sorrow seemed well nigh full.

The one overflowing drop which alone remained to be added, was a misunderstanding between her-

self and the Countess. Margaret scarcely knew before this moment how dearly she loved Beatrice. Whilst all was bright and smooth, she had suffered her affections to rest upon an earthly friend, and had seldom seriously questioned whether the heart which was given to her was in any way diverted from God. It had at first appeared to be the thirst for truth, which caused her to listen so eagerly whilst Beatrice, in fervent impassioned language, spoke of the comforts provided by her religion; but had the same words been uttered by another voice, they would have been comparatively without power. Even Father Andrea's remarks were received with indifference, when Beatrice was present. Margaret could reason upon them, and sometimes doubt if they were convincing; but when Beatrice spoke her reason was silenced. The brilliant smile,—the eloquent glance of the eye,—the gentle caress,—were all that was needed to induce her to give, at least for the time, an assent to whatever principle might be brought forward, although she would not openly acknowledge it. Margaret loved Beatrice more than she loved truth, and having now a dread that a change might be about to pass over the "spirit of her dream," she perceived how entirely her affections had been withdrawn from all other objects to centre upon this one. The thought could not be unmixed with fear. She had loved the Countess, it might be, too well. She had loved where she had been warned of danger—where there was no mutual basis of religious faith. Was it certain that the blessing of God rested upon their friendship? Yet without it, how could it be expected to stand?

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Countess Novera was in the enjoyment of brighter hopes. The transient distrust which had clouded her happiness in Margaret's society had, she believed, passed away never to return. Margaret's avowed intention of applying to Father Andrea, and the questions which she had already begun to ask regarding some of the doctrines of the Church of Rome, were so many reproaches for ever having thought her timid or lukewarm. She was now looking forward to the return of the confessor, in the full persuasion that after a little more personal intercourse with him, Margaret's mind would be settled. And then the Countess was neither selfish nor cold-hearted, but it had undoubtedly happened most opportunely for her imaginative happiness that Lucia Fontana should, just at this time, have expressed a decided wish to return to her own country.

The absence of the young Italian would free Beatrice from all restraint, and leave her at liberty, if persecution were the result of Margaret's change of faith, to offer her an asylum either in England or in Italy. The latter had of late been the country most frequently in the Countess's thoughts. Since the day when she imprudently braved the north-east wind, the spasm in her side had become a fixed, aching pain, and the trifling cough, which before she called nothing, now often served to break her

rest for hours at night. Beatrice was blessed with a buoyant disposition, but she could not be blind to these symptoms. They showed that an English climate was not good for her. But in either case,—England or Italy,—she was hopeful that Margaret would ultimately be her friend for life; a friend in the fullest sense of the word; one united with her in the most sacred and enduring attachment, and upon whom she might lavish all her affection and generosity with no vow to form a limit to her desires.

Lucia's determination, first expressed in a moment of pique, was persisted in because she was indignant at finding that the Countess did not resent it. Poor Lucia! she had full cause now for jealousy, and jealousy is, of all passions, that which makes us inflict the most torment on ourselves. After volunteering to go away, she shut herself up, refusing to eat, refusing to see any one, insisting even upon not being disturbed by Father Andrea. The next day she appeared as usual, and complained of illness. The Countess overlooked her waywardness, and offered her kind attentions; but they were not sufficient in Lucia's eyes. She required an apology where there had been no just cause of offence, and expected the Countess to profess great regret at the possibility of her returning to Italy. As Father Andrea had left them early that morning, Beatrice had found no time for conversation before he went, and did not like to make him uncomfortable at the last moment. He was to return soon, and before that Lucia's mood might perhaps pass away. But, instead, Lucia became more gloomy. The Countess thought the cause of this might be that there were constant notes from the Grove, and she endeavoured to read them privately, and without comments. Lucia, however, was perpetually alluding to them or to Margaret, and the Countess

was obliged to answer her, having no right to surmise that her extreme anxiety to know how poor Mrs. Clive was bearing up under her loss, or what opinion had been expressed of Dr. Percival, proceeded from any but an amiable motive. Lucia tortured herself by making the inquiries, but she could not resist them. If Margaret's notes were read without remark, her irritation became scarcely controllable. If observations were made about them, they were instantly construed to mean not only that the Countess was fond of Margaret, but that she did not like Lucia. Beatrice could not be sorry when Mrs. St. Aubyn called and took Lucia out for a drive, or to spend the day. She was then free to answer Margaret's notes at leisure, or write to Father Andrea concerning any difficult points which she could not fully explain herself; and she could rest on the sofa, and allow herself to be ill and suffering, without being reminded by a jealous affection that she had been miserably imprudent. Her longing to see Margaret grew intense in these hours of solitude; but there was a fresh disappointment every day, and the cold winds prevented her from leaving the house. Still the Countess bore up cheerfully; every thing was light when compared with a distrust of Margaret's strength of character.

More than a week had elapsed since Father Andrea's departure. The Countess knew nothing of the state of affairs at Ashington beyond the fact that Agatha was ill and with her parents. This did not strike her as peculiarly strange; but it fretted her, as being an additional claim upon Margaret's time, and rendering it less likely that she should see her. Lucia was gone to dine with Mrs. St. Aubyn, and the Countess interested herself by reading Margaret's notes, which she had preserved from the commencement of their acquaintance, and

tracing the steps by which she had been brought to her present state of feeling in regard to the Romish Church. Beatrice was happy in the occupation, for she had reason to hope that it was mainly through her instrumentality that Margaret had been brought so far to a knowledge of what she considered truth. Something of her early romance returned, as she dwelt with delight upon the idea that she had lived for some object; that she had accomplished a work; and that now, if it should please God to call her to Himself, she might die satisfied in the belief that she had rescued one soul, at least, from the bonds of fatal error. Margaret, humble-minded, yet highly gifted,—pure sincere, and self-denying, seemed more worthy of her love than ever; and when they were united in one faith, the Countess believed that she should have, as regarded affection, no other earthly wish. But this happiness did not last. Late in the afternoon, Beatrice was standing in the dining-room, looking at the picture of the Viscountess de Lisle. Her attention had been more particularly drawn to it since she had conversed with Margaret upon the history connected with it; and in her sad moods she was apt to fancy that the incidents in the life of her proud ancestress were a prophecy of her own; that her expectations would be disappointed; and that Margaret would prove as unstable as the unfortunate Rachel de Lisle. Even then, when she was so much more hopeful, a foreboding stole over her, disagreeable recollections came to her mind — Lucia's observations upon the low tone of the family, and a remembrance of Margaret's former procrastination, together with her present perplexities, which were often irritating to the Countess's impatience. It was a natural re-action after a fit of enthusiasm, to which Beatrice was often subject,

and which the hour of the day served to increase. The evening was closing in, grey clouds were fast gathering over the bright western sky, and the distant landscape was growing indistinct. There were few signs of life to be heard, for the servants were in a distant part of the house; and the Countess, weary and in pain, was overcome by a sense of loneliness. Margaret trusted her more fully than she trusted Margaret. In all the distressing scenes which had lately passed at the Grove, Margaret's affection had known no alternations from any oppression of spirits. She was as true to the Countess at one moment as at another. But Beatrice was ill; feverish, and restless, and unable to exercise her usual self-command. Where she loved, she loved sincerely; but she was actuated by impulse, and swayed by outward circumstances; and Margaret would scarcely have recognised in the wayward, desponding mind, which in the evening was conjuring up doubts and difficulties, the same friend who had a few hours before believed that her best wishes were about to be accomplished. The twilight had become darkness; but the Countess was indisposed for exertion, and neither books, writing, nor work could be an amusement to her. She was summoning up her energy to rise from the sofa, when the noise of carriage-wheels announced Lucia's return. It was much earlier than Beatrice anticipated, and though solitude was then dreary, she was not inclined for this interruption. She rose, rang the bell for lights, and stirred the fire, unwilling that Lucia should think her over-fatigued. A cheerful voice also was assumed when Lucia came in, and the Countess endeavoured, as much as she could, to conceal that she had been lonely or unhappy. But the restraint was annoying, and Lucia discovered that her welcome was not cordial.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn had promised to spend the evening with her brother," she said, in answer to the Countess's question why she was so early returned. "He wants a companion, poor man!"

"I suppose so, now his wife is away," replied Beatrice, trying to appear interested. "Have you heard how Mrs. Clive is?"

"I did not know there was much the matter with her," said Lucia.

"Oh, yes; you must have heard. Don't you remember my telling you what Margaret—Miss Percival—has said in her notes about Mrs. Clive being ill?"

"Miss Percival's version of the story," observed Lucia, shortly, and the light falling upon her face, showed that it wore an expression of satire. The Countess did not, as usual, put an end to the conversation, when the family at the Grove were its subjects. "Mrs. St. Aubyn is very much shocked, and so is every one," continued Lucia; "and no wonder."

"Yes, the poor baby's death was very sudden at last," said the Countess.

Lucia smiled, but only looked an answer; and when she saw that Beatrice was curious, went away to take off her shawl and bonnet and prepare for tea. The Countess, again left alone, resolved to be cautious, and not ask any questions to which she should be likely to receive disagreeable answers. Whatever there might be to tell, she would be certain to hear from Margaret. Besides, it was necessary to talk to Lucia upon another subject. A letter from Father Andrea that day had mentioned that the Countess's friend, Lady Anstruther, intended soon to go to Italy, and Beatrice wished to sound Lucia as to her intention of remaining in England. If she were still decided upon going,

it would be happier for both parties that the separation should take place soon. In Lucia's present state her life at Henningsley was necessarily wretched, and Beatrice was satisfied that on her part every sacrifice of personal wishes had been made, which duty required; so that she had no hesitation in concurring with, and furthering her expressed desires.

Lucia returned to the drawing-room, unsuspicious of the shock which awaited her. Moody, jealous persons, frequently imagine that they may indulge their humour, and only offend themselves; they have no idea of the pain they inflict by half sighs, and melancholy tones, and Lucia fully believed that she might be as gloomy as she chose without really vexing the Countess. Beatrice was at all times gentle, and dignified in manner, and the very strength of her feeling for Margaret caused a particular reserve in every case in which she was the cause of difference. Lucia had often been annoyed at not perceiving a greater effect from her observations; but the arrow wounded, though she did not discover it. The Countess kept up the conversation for a little while upon indifferent topics; but at length, being desirous to see how her communication would be received, she said, "Did you know that I heard from Father Andrea to-day?"

"I saw his handwriting," was the reply.

"He will not be here directly, for he is going into Kent; but he wishes me to follow him to London," continued the Countess. "Lady Anstruther will be there for some time before she goes to Italy, and he thinks that will be a comfort to me. I certainly require medical advice."

"Lady Anstruther going to Italy!" said Lucia.

"Yes. She is to take her child to Florence for the winter—in fact, the physician says she must

live abroad for a few years. It might be fortunate for us if she were going immediately." Lucia was surprised, and looked up from her work. "I mean fortunate as far as any of our plans are concerned," pursued the Countess.

"Ours! but, Signora — surely you do not, — you cannot be thinking of returning home?" Lucia's moodiness vanished as the idea presented itself. Her dark eyes were unwontedly brilliant in their expression of satisfaction, and Beatrice could not help being sorry for the disappointment in store for her. "I was not thinking of myself so much, Lucia," she said, in a gentle tone; "but when I heard of Lady Anstruther's plans, it struck me that since you are so anxious to re-visit your friends, it would be ——" The Countess was not allowed to finish the sentence.

"A good opportunity for me to go?" said Lucia, speaking very slowly.

Beatrice hesitated to answer; she appeared busy with her embroidery frame. "It would be much pleasanter for you," she said, after a few moments' pause, "and much more satisfactory to me; because under other circumstances, you would be obliged to travel with strangers."

Lucia's heart was nearly bursting with grief and vexation. She was entangled, as it were, in her own snare. The many occasions on which she had lately repeated that she was resolved to leave Henningsley, whenever a good opportunity offered itself, had then been treasured up against her. Her petulant, idle words had been received as a serious resolution. Tears rushed to her eyes, but her pride checked them.

"I must be very anxious for your happiness, Lucia," continued the Countess, "though I am so little able to promote it. It is doubtless better for

us both to part, but I would use every endeavour to make the separation easy."

"There can be no difficulty in that, Signora," said Lucia, bitterly; "to you, at least."

"You do me wrong, Lucia," replied Beatrice: "it is very hard to part: it would be still more so, if I were not convinced that whilst you are with me you can never be satisfied. If you had no relations in Italy, I should not have entertained the idea, however you might have urged it; but since you are not friendless, it is certainly desirable that in this case you should follow your own will."

Lucia threw down her work, and walked to the fire-place. The Countess followed her with a pang of conscience, for having too willingly acquiesced in the idea. She approached Lucia, and would have kissed her, but Lucia drew back her head, saying, "May I ask what day you have fixed on for my departure?"

The Countess had been prepared for a torrent of grief, perhaps even reproaches, but she could not tell how to contend against this cold disdain; and she expected to see it give way, and be succeeded by a violent burst of passion. "We will not talk about it any more just now," she said; "it is distressing to us both: when Father Andrea is with us, he will be more able to advise you than I am."

"No, no," exclaimed Lucia, vehemently; "Wait for Father Andrea! I would rather leave you this very night. Since I am an incumbrance, I will go — by myself, to-morrow, — I care not how soon. I will return to Italy. There are friends there who will acknowledge, and never cast me off."

Beatrice was unprepared with a reply, and sat down again, whilst Lucia remained in her former position, mechanically moving and replacing some of the ornaments on the mantel-piece. A silence

ensued; the Countess thought that Lucia would go to her own room; but these were not circumstances under which Lucia could think of solitude. The struggle in her mind was fearful; and at last, jealousy gained the victory over pride, and broke forth: "It is unworthy of you to conceal the truth, Signora. Say at once that you no longer love me. Miss Percival will be at hand to fill my place. The heretic faith can be no matter of consideration, after the many months of intimacy." The haughty spirit of the De Lisles was roused by this taunt. The flush of fever which was burning on the Countess's cheek died away, and her lips were firmly pressed together, in the effort of retaining the words which would fain have replied to it. "You cannot answer me," continued Lucia. "I thank you for your silence, Signora; it tells me all."

"It tells you, Lucia," said the Countess, raising her eyes with an expression of stern forbearance, "that your words are ungrateful and unbecoming. The proposal that we should part came from you."

"And the cause!" rejoined Lucia: "who was it drove me to it? who was it robbed me of your affections? Fawning, mercenary ——"

"Hush, Lucia!" interrupted Beatrice; "be careful. If Miss Percival's name is uttered by you this night with any terms of disrespect, to-morrow we part for ever."

Lucia trembled: for even in the height of her passion, she stood in awe of the Countess's commanding voice and manner. "I have no desire to speak with disrespect of her, or of any person," she said, more calmly, but with increased bitterness. "I would say only the truth. Let us part when and how we may, your happiness must ever be dearer to me than life; and when I see you de-

ceived, it can scarcely be strange that I should wish to open your eyes."

The Countess knew the spirit in which this observation was made, and her generous disposition instantly repelled the insinuation against Margaret; but her affection was not invulnerable. She listened, though every word was a dagger, and Lucia continued: "I will not speak of myself, Signora, I would only request you to hearken to the opinion of your friends. Miss Percival is in great estimation at Henningsley. It would be happy for her if the same opinion were entertained elsewhere."

"I do not choose to hear these absurd mysteries, Lucia," replied the Countess, in a tone of weariness; "what have you to say against Miss Percival? Speak openly, for you will never rest satisfied until you have done so."

"Nay," said Lucia, ironically, "it can be nothing to me. If Miss Percival is the common subject of conversation in the neighbourhood, and if every one blames her, even more than her parents, — I am not her friend."

"Blames!" repeated the Countess, leaning forward with eagerness; "who ventures to blame Margaret?"

"No one would do so, doubtless," replied Lucia, "if it were known that the Countess Novera was willing to answer for her; but there has been great wrong somewhere. Mrs. Clive has quarrelled with her husband; she has left him now, when he is suffering from the loss of his child; she has protested that under no circumstances will she return; and report says that Miss Percival is the counsellor and the abettor of such conduct."

"Folly! low-minded scandal!" exclaimed Beatrice, whilst a smile of derision curled her lip. Lucia did not repeat her assertion, for she knew the Coun-

tess's disposition well, and was certain that she would not be contented without enquiring into the statement fully. "Quarrelled with her husband?" repeated Beatrice, after a few moments' silence.

"It is scandal," said Lucia. "But Mrs. Clive left Ashington in company with Miss Percival, on the very day the Colonel returned. That information came from Mrs. St. Aubyn."

"And Margaret not to have mentioned it!" murmured Beatrice to herself.

"Miss Percival could not have suspected your disapproval," said Lucia. The Countess's face betrayed her emotion, and Lucia was almost sorry for the pain she was inflicting. "You have little feeling for me, Signora," she said, with greater gentleness of manner than she had yet shown; "but the love of the orphan girl, whom you have cherished from childhood, cannot be shaken by disappointment. If Miss Percival were worthy of your affection, I could return to Italy and be happy; no, not happy—that cannot be, when absent from you—but satisfied in the thought that you were so."

Beatrice was struck by Lucia's manner, for however she might condemn her jealousy, she had no doubt of her truth.

"I do not suppose, Lucia," she said, "that you can intentionally mean to distress me, but you have been imposed upon by some idle rumours. When I know better what they are, I will show you how wrong it is to believe evil hastily."

This permission was all which Lucia desired; and she immediately began to detail the facts that had come to her knowledge, of the frequent disagreements between Agatha and her husband, which, she said, had been encouraged by Margaret, who, having originally disliked the marriage,—Mrs St. Aubyn thought from a feeling of jealousy,

that her sister should hold a higher position in society than herself, — had ever since shown her aversion both to the Colonel and Mrs. St. Aubyn in a marked manner.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn wished to be kind to her, Signora," she added; "and you may judge from her attention to me what she would have done for a near connection; but Miss Percival's icy manner could never be overcome. Mrs. Clive was always more fond of her sister than of any one else; and Mrs. St. Aubyn says she is sure that every thing might have been put on a right footing, if she had only exerted herself. Mrs. Percival did all she could; but when the sisters upheld each other, her wishes were of no avail. What was the real cause of Mrs. Clive's taking that very strange step, — leaving Ashington, — no one can exactly tell. The servants report that there was some difference of opinion about carrying the child to London for advice; at any rate it is quite certain that Miss Percival approved, and declared there was nothing else to be done; and ever since then she has appeared quite indifferent,—never expressed any regret, and pretended that it was natural, and that Mrs. Clive required her health to be watched; whilst all the time, in secret, she has been urging her sister to remain where she is, and not allowing a note or a word to pass between her and her husband."

"And for what object does Mrs. St. Aubyn pretend to say that Margaret Percival can act in this manner?" asked the Countess, proudly.

"Mrs. St. Aubyn pretends nothing, Signora; she repeats only what she knows to be fact. Other persons state that the Percivals have been ruined by the extravagance of the elder son, that they are indignant at receiving no assistance from Colonel Clive; and that in revenge they — especially Miss

Percival—have fomented the division between him and his wife, in the hope that if affairs are brought to a crisis, he may be prevailed on to buy a peace, by settling a handsome sum on Mrs. Clive. If that should be the case, of course Mrs. Clive will continue to live at the Grove, and help to keep up the family fortunes."

"Really! Lucia," exclaimed Beatrice, greatly indignant, "this is worse than I could possibly have imagined. What can induce you to listen to such unfounded calumnies? What evidence is there to prove, in the least, one word of what you have said?"

"Merely the evidence of general opinion, as to the mercenary character of the family," replied Lucia, in a provoking tone; "besides certain known facts. You yourself, Signora, can judge whether Miss Percival ever spoke of Colonel Clive in any terms of regard."

"She never did the contrary," replied Beatrice.

"Perhaps not. Miss Percival seems to have practised a curious reserve as to the whole business."

The Countess inwardly writhed under the wound inflicted by this observation. It was the point on which she was peculiarly susceptible; and during all Lucia's details, the circumstance which had rested the most unpleasantly on her mind was that Margaret had kept back the confidence which she deemed to be rightly her due.

"I do not wish to prejudice you, Signora," continued Lucia; "but it must doubtless be desirable that you should consider whether Miss Percival's affection is likely to give you comfort. A heretic, too, a Protestant!"

"There at least you are mistaken, Lucia," exclaimed Beatrice, betrayed into a sudden incau-

tiousness. "Margaret Percival will, before many months are over, be one with us."

Lucia's countenance evinced no surprise; but as she stepped forward, and placed herself opposite the Countess, a smile of keen satire played upon her lip, whilst she answered, —

"And do you really believe this, Signora?"

"As firmly as I believe in my own devotion to our Holy Church," replied the Countess.

Lucia considered for an instant, and then said, in an under tone, —

"It is strange: then Mrs. St. Aubyn was right."

"Mrs. St. Aubyn, again!" observed the Countess quickly; "what has she to say as to Margaret Percival's religion?'

"Mrs. St. Aubyn is clear-sighted," replied Lucia. "I one day noticed Miss Percival's apparent interest in the Catholic Church, and she replied that Miss Percival was playing with you; that she had no intention whatever of sacrificing her family happiness by changing her religion."

"And what grounds can Mrs. St. Aubyn have for making such a declaration?"

"Really I cannot pretend to say; but she has known Miss Percival so long, she must be aware of her disposition."

The Countess, with an impatient gesture, remarked that it was a curious subject to converse upon.

"A very natural one," replied Lucia; "Miss Percival's intimacy here, and her attention to the Catholic peasantry on the Henningsley estate, have been observed by every one."

"And Mrs. St. Aubyn is not charitable enough to suppose that Margaret's eyes are becoming open to her errors?"

"In some cases such a conclusion might be war-

ranted, Signora; but you may judge for yourself. Miss Percival, whilst affecting to inquire after truth, is in constant correspondence with her uncle, an English clergyman, a most decided opponent of our holy faith."

A smouldering spark of distrust revived in the Countess's breast as Lucia said this. It was the distrust she had before entertained, when Mr. Sutherland had been casually mentioned. She would not, however, acknowledge it; and, suddenly rising, proposed that they should retire to rest, though it was earlier than the usual hour. Whilst still lingering in the room, however, she allowed Lucia to perceive that her words had taken effect; for stopping, as she was collecting her work, she said, haughtily, —

"Mrs. St. Aubyn, with all her ingenuity, cannot at least believe that Margaret has any interest in misleading me."

"Indeed," replied Lucia, incredulously, "it would seem to me that Miss Percival has already gained much by her pretended zeal for religion. She has won your affection, and doubtless she hopes to profit by it."

"I repel your insinuations, Lucia," exclaimed the Countess, unable any longer to control herself; "I take shame to myself for having listened to them. Margaret is upright, and pure in every thought; she would endure any suffering rather than give cause for the least of the base calumnies which have been set abroad concerning her."

"Then try her, test her," replied Lucia; and she laughed scornfully.

"Test her! How?"

"Tell her that, as a Protestant, she has nothing to expect from you. Repeat the vow by which you are pledged to give up every thing to the interests

of the Church, and then see — will she love you still?"

Beatrice scarcely listened to the last words. Agitated and wretched, she hurried from the apartment; and it was not till she had reached her own chamber that a feeling of overpowering indignation succeeded, as she more fully comprehended the taunt with which the conversation had concluded.

CHAPTER XIX.

And Lucia Fontana was then a slanderer, wilfully endeavouring to prejudice the Countess Novera against an innocent person. Yet such was not exactly the case. Lucia had said nothing which she had not some reason to suppose true; but under the influence of jealousy and disappointment she had forgotten the Christian rule, "not to speak evil one of another." Have we not all at times sinned in like manner? Repeating tales which have been circulated in general society, drawing wrong inferences from known facts, or, asserting positively, statements which have originally been made hypothetically? There is but one safe line for us all, — the line drawn by the Bible. The evil which we hear must be buried in our own bosoms, unless drawn forth by an undoubted call of duty. If we venture to overstep this mark, we break a direct command, and cannot be guiltless of the consequences of our careless words. But, whether true or false, Lucia's hints were equally destructive of the Countess's peace of mind. If an open accusation had been made, contradictory facts might have been brought to disprove it; but there is no arguing against inferences. We may draw one conclusion, our friends may draw another, and which is right time only can decide. Beatrice lay awake a great part of the night, striving to convince herself that all which Lucia had said was the result of jealous unkindness, whilst haunted

by remembrances of Margaret's want of confidence, and her own fruitless efforts to penetrate the mystery in which Dr. Percival's family affairs had lately been involved. Lucia's remarks, indeed, afforded no tangible ground of offence. Margaret could not be proved to have done any thing which the world had a right to condemn; but the mere idea that she could be talked of, censured, supposed to be influenced by low motives, was sufficient to destroy the charm with which Beatrice had in imagination invested her. She was no longer separate from her family, raised above them by the purity and elevation of her character. She was not Margaret, — the cherished, accomplished, refined friend, to whom every thought could be confided, but Miss Percival, — the daughter of the worldly Dr. Percival, — the pupil of a bustling, common-minded mother, — the sister of the cold-hearted, money-loving Mrs. Clive. Mr. Sutherland had rightly warned Margaret of the natural instability of an unequal friendship. Had Beatrice moved in a lower sphere she would never have been as susceptible of doubt, for she would have mixed with Margaret's family, and understood the difficulties of her position; and the circumstances which now seemed to threaten the security of their affection, might then have served to unite them more closely to each other.

The Countess and Margaret were to meet on the following day. How Margaret's heart bounded with pleasure as the thought came to her mind when she awoke! Illness and anxiety, petty cares, and doubts, and fears, were alike for the moment forgotten. The day opened brightly, and the young, hopeful spirit, which early trials had not yet subdued into equanimity, seemed to shake off every weight, and almost to rejoice as in the days of un-

troubled childhood. Such moments come to us in the spring time of life as suddenly though not as frequently as the forebodings of fear, but they are gone almost as soon as tasted. Margaret's gladness vanished in an instant when she remembered Miss Debrett's conversation. She reminded herself that it was doing the Countess injustice to imagine that she could be so easily wrought upon by reports; but nevertheless the fear of some change rankled in her breast; and she counted the hours which must intervene before she saw Beatrice, from a sense that her mind would not be at ease until then. Sometimes she thought that she would tell every thing, — Craven's folly, and the pecuniary difficulties, and Agatha's wilful neglect of duty; but pride stopped her. The Countess was not like a common friend, she was too superior to enter into these every-day troubles. Her peculiar position shielded her from them. But again, confidence seemed just now essential to affection, and Beatrice evidently expected more than she received. It might be best to be guided by circumstances as to how much or how little was to be told; but at all events it could scarcely be difficult to explain that she had no participation in her sister's misconduct.

The post-bag was now dreaded by Margaret, and indeed by every one in the family who had any powers of observation. Margaret could not overcome a fear of hearing something more of extravagance from Craven, though he had given no fresh cause for suspicion, and Dr. Percival was in great agitation whenever he opened a letter of business. There were several for him on this morning, and when they were read Mrs. Percival came out of his room much discomposed, and sent immediately for Mr. Prior. Margaret knew quite well that something unpleasant was going on; it did not appear

very alarming, but Mr. Prior was always associated with money matters, and the natural supposition was that he was called in to consult upon the failing fortunes of the family. Margaret did then wish herself a man — able to work, to gain money in any way. It seemed that as a woman she could only be a burden. There was no one to whom they could apply for any immediate assistance, for they had few relations, and those but little known personally; and though living respectably and comfortably, they could not be supposed to have a large sum of ready money at command. Mr. Sutherland was a poor man, just able by great self-denial to take care of his parish, but nothing more. Margaret did not believe that her family were destined to starve upon nothing; but she saw that a considerable change must be undergone, and she grieved especially for George. His college expenses would be a serious item in the yearly accounts, and Dr. Percival had more than once talked of removing him from Oxford, and placing him in a merchant's office to please his godfather. Margaret alone was aware how great a trial this would be. She knew how entirely her brother's heart was given to his intended profession, and she could not bear to think of the blank which would spread itself over his life, if the prospect of taking orders were destroyed. Once or twice she had hinted the subject to her mother; but Mrs. Percival would not hear of the possibility of any such alteration in their circumstances as to render the step necessary. She lived upon hope, and until this day had derived from it a very substantial support. Now, however, when she came into the school-room after Mr. Prior was gone, Margaret saw that the world was not even as bright as usual. Her mother looked very anxious. "Margaret, my dear, I must speak to you directly. Children,

don't tease your sister. Stand away, Philip; Margaret cannot attend to you just this minute."

Margaret gave a few directions to the children, and then followed Mrs. Percival into another room.

"It is very strange, Margaret," began her mother, immediately that the door was closed, "I never understood clearly before what a state Craven has brought us into. Your father talks of being obliged to raise money — actually raise it upon the insurances. He tells me he has consulted Mr. Prior, and when I asked him what will become of us, if he does, in the event of any thing happening to him, all he can say is, he does not know. Do you think he is in earnest?"

Margaret was a little inclined to smile at the notion; it was not a question upon which the father of a family was likely to jest. "If you remember, mamma," she said, "I told you some time since that it was likely to come to this soon. My father mentioned it once in the course of conversation, and I saw directly that unless his health improved materially there was nothing else to be done."

"Strange!" again repeated Mrs. Percival; "such a good income as he has always had, and no one can accuse us of extravagance. It is extremely hard that things should reach this pass through Craven's folly."

Margaret did not think it hard, because that would have been repining at Providence; and seeing that the cheerfulness of the family was likely to depend upon her, she expressed a hope, which in her heart was but very slight, that her father might soon be well. The hope, however, had just the contrary effect from her anticipations. Mrs. Percival became much graver than before, whilst she said that if domestic affairs were to continue as harassing as they then were, she would not answer

for the consequences. Mr. Harrison had said that quiet of mind was essential, and had proposed to have Dr. Hastings called in for a consultation, he thought so badly of Dr. Percival.

"And papa will not hear of that, of course," said Margaret. "He looks upon Dr. Hastings as an intruder, because people say he intends to settle in Staunton."

"That was what I should have supposed, Margaret," replied Mrs. Percival, "but, one never can answer for men's fancies. Your father does not at all object. He is very much altered lately, certainly. He will submit to any thing."

Mrs. Percival's notions of submission, at the moment, were of obedience to the law of a medical man; but Margaret thought of accordance with the will of God, and she did really hope, that in this respect her father was altered.

"Perhaps papa would like me to sit with him a little while," she said. "I can set the children to work by themselves, and I know you and Agatha were going out."

"Ah! poor Agatha!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, heaving a sigh; "that is something else to be sorry for. Such a blighted life! She will never be what she was, Margaret."

It was not a pleasant subject for Margaret to discuss, especially with the expectation of being obliged to explain it to the Countess Novera. Try as she would to be charitable, it was not possible to shut her eyes to the fact that Agatha was the author of her own trial and of others also. "She can never be happy, mamma, until she is forgiven by Colonel Clive."

"Forgiven! Margaret, my love, how wildly you talk! It is she, poor child, who has to forgive every thing."

"A good deal, I own, mamma; but the overt act of the quarrel was hers, and the world thinks so, and condemns her and us in consequence."

Mrs. Percival looked very unhappy, as she remembered the delightful prospects in which she had once indulged for her daughter, whilst the tenderness of a mother made her repel every idea of blame attaching to her. "I must tell you, Margaret, that you are too young to decide upon these subjects," she replied. "Girls should trust to the judgment of their elders and not form hasty opinions. The reconciliation will come by and by, when the Colonel sees how badly he has treated her."

In former days Margaret's had been a proud spirit; but that time was past. Even had religious principle not rendered her humble, she was too unhappy to resent such an observation. Besides, it might be true — at all events, she had no reason, from late experience, to suppose her judgment good. "I will go to papa," she said mildly, "if you think he would like to have me."

Mrs. Percival was glad of the proposition; "but there were many things," she observed, "which it was necessary to talk over together. They must determine upon parting with some of the servants, and lessening their expenses. Still things could not be done in a hurry; they would just wait and see what opinion Dr. Hastings gave, and by that time Mr. Sutherland might be at home." Margaret answered,—

"That her uncle could do but little for them. If retrenchment were requisite, it seemed that the sooner it began the better."

"Yes, my dear, certainly; but there is no hurry to-day; and your father is fanciful. I can't help hoping he sees things worse than they really are."

"Scarcely possible," thought Margaret; but she

did not consider herself called upon to remonstrate farther. As her mother had said, there was no hurry for that day.

Mrs. Percival's sanguine spirit was rising again, merely because she had talked of her anxieties. She remarked, that worse storms had passed away, and Margaret could not contradict the fact, though the experience had not been granted to their own family. Leaving the children, as she now often was compelled to do, to pursue their employments alone, she went to her father's room, to soothe him, if possible, by a few cheerful observations, and then direct his mind to higher comfort by offering to read to him the Psalms and lessons for the day, to which for some weeks he had professed himself willing and happy to listen.

CHAPTER XX.

When Margaret reached Henningsley late in the afternoon, she found symptoms of uneasiness in the household, though not so great as those which she had left behind her at the Grove. The Countess's maid hearing her voice, came to meet her in the hall.

"Her mistress," she said, "was not well, and had not left her room. She had given orders to be denied to every one except Miss Percival."

"What was the matter?" Margaret asked.

Lauretta did not know, "but her lady had looked ill lately, and complained of sleeping badly. In her own opinion the place did not agree with her, and she was not at all sorry to hear the Countess say this morning that she thought of leaving it immediately." A cold chill struck upon Margaret's heart when she heard this. She stood still, and Lauretta, who considered her time peculiarly precious when her mistress was ill, began to be impatient. Margaret enquired if there was any other person at home. She had a half-dread of meeting Father Andrea. Lauretta "believed that the Signorina Fontana was in the garden, but she was not sure;" and as she spoke Lucia appeared. A scowl gathered on her brow at the sight of the unwelcome visitor. She bowed distantly, and hurried on, stopping however when she was hidden from view, to watch with a jealous eye whilst Margaret hastened up the private staircase which led to the Countess's apartments. Margaret's admission to the presence of Beatrice

was a grievance the most unpardonable of all. She herself had been excluded.

"I have always melancholy associations with this staircase, Lauretta," said Margaret, pausing at the top, and pointing to the narrow, winding flight of steps, which ascending still higher, led to the chamber that had been occupied by Rhoda Newbolt. "Do you remember the poor girl who died?"

Lauretta shuddered, and then smiled. "It was a gloomy time," she said; "but Father Andrea had assured them that it was a blessed one. She often heard him wish that all English people could be as sure of salvation."

Margaret was heard to sigh, and then the girl blushed, conscious that she might have given pain.

"Rhoda loved you much, Signorina," she said. "She often prayed for you."

"Are you sure of that?" enquired Margaret, with greater eagerness of manner than she had intended to betray.

"Ah, Signorina," it was not once, but hundreds of times, and she made us all, Father Andrea, and every one, promise we would pray too; but the holy father had no need to be reminded."

"He does, then, think of me and interest himself about me," thought Margaret, "and he makes others think also. Who, but my uncle, has such a care for me in the English Church?" Lauretta shared something of her mistress's regard for Margaret, whose gentleness and courtesy were in marked contrast to Lucia's manner. She waited at the door of the Countess's chamber, half hoping that Margaret would say something else; but Margaret for once was unmindful of the kind words which cost so little, and make such certain friends. Her thoughts had turned from Rhoda and the unknown state of

existence upon which she had entered, to the reception which she was about to meet from the Countess Novera.

Had Beatrice been asked upon what peculiar quality she most prided herself, she would have named self-command — the power of retaining the same calm exterior, whatever might be her inward agitation. But the eye of affection is too keen for any such concealment. Margaret saw that she was not received as usual. The gentle tones of endearment, the kiss, and the smile of pleasure were expected and received; but then a change came over the Countess's manner, a restraint which she evidently strove to shake off, whilst with affectionate reproaches she assured Margaret how lonely she had been since they last parted.

"Even Father Andrea is gone from me now," she said, "so that I have only Lucia with me; and you know she is not the most congenial companion I could have."

"I met the Signorina Fontana in the hall," replied Margaret, "and I thought she looked more sad than usual."

"Yes, poor Lucia! she is excessively to be pitied; yet it is her own doing: her jealous moods are worse for herself even than for me."

"They have made you ill," said Margaret, casting an anxious glance at the Countess's pale face, as she lay on the sofa, apparently worn with fatigue, when the day was scarcely more than half over.

Beatrice slightly blushed, and her eyes were averted from Margaret, whilst she answered: — "I am not affected enough by them, I am afraid, to make me ill."

"But you are ill, dear Beatrice, your hand is burning."

The Countess laughed faintly. "You are so ac-

customed to illness, Margaret, that you see it where it hardly exists. Tell me about your own invalids ; your father, and — your sister."

Something in the intonation of the voice struck Margaret disagreeably ; the sentence sounded formal, and her reply was in the same style ; yet she hated herself for it, was ashamed of being suspicious, and only trusted that the Countess would be candid if she had any thing upon her mind. A similar train of thought suggested itself to Beatrice, and she paused to give Margaret an opportunity for referring more fully to Agatha if she wished it. The interview was unlike every previous one, and Margaret felt that she could not long bear it. She knelt by the Countess, and kissed her many times without speaking, and Beatrice seemed contented with her presence, even if the silence were not broken. But their eyes met, and Margaret's were filled with tears. Beatrice raised herself suddenly, and said in a tone of melancholy : —

" Margaret, I sometimes think that you and I were not born for happiness."

" Do you ? " and Margaret smiled through her tears ; " then it is I who have taught you to think so. I have no right to disturb your peace with my troubles."

" Not if I would rather, a thousand times rather, know them, than be ignorant ? "

" Dear Beatrice, be contented with your ignorance," sighed Margaret. " You could not do me good, I have said so often before."

" And my love is nothing, Margaret ? "

" Nothing ! Every thing ; my comfort and joy, and pride, and therefore I would not sully it with such earthly cares."

" As what ? " The Countess spoke in an eager tone, and then withdrew her hand from Margaret's,

from a sense of humiliation. How could she stoop to seek for a confidence, which it seemed was not to be given her?

"If I thought," began Margaret—"If I could hope, but—"

Shame tinged her cheek, and dyed her forehead with crimson. In the presence of Beatrice her resolution failed. The painful family details were almost degrading; extravagance, and temper, and a calculating worldly spirit, were perfectly foreign to the Countess's chastened disposition. Beatrice kept her eye fixed steadily before her, but she was secretly impatient. She could not comprehend Margaret's hesitation, willingly as she would herself have shared every family distress with one whom she loved so truly. After waiting for a few words of encouragement, and finding herself disappointed, Margaret again began: —

"If I thought you were really in earnest, that you could care to hear! but there are so many things — my father's illness, and money matters, and Agatha —:" she could scarcely bring herself to pronounce her sister's name.

The Countess looked up with an expression of satisfaction: "I wanted to hear of her, Margaret, more than all."

She expected an instant reply; but a change came over Margaret. She was proud in her turn; for even the most humble-minded are susceptible sometimes of pride for their relations, which they would never have indulged for themselves.

"I know," she said, "that the world has been busy with my sister's name. Agatha has been accused of cold-heartedness and a fretful temper, which, it is supposed, have caused a disagreement between herself and her husband; but, Beatrice,

you cannot wish me to expose the faults of one so near to me."

"Expose! Margaret, no; for myself I should never have asked it. I could not have imagined for an instant that you had any share in causing the separation."

"Me! Oh, Beatrice, who has been so cruel, so unjust? and you to believe it! to think it possible!"

"Dearest Margaret, you are unjust yourself. I did not believe it. I said it was false. I was sure that Lucia had listened to slanders; but own that on one point I have had reason to complain. The world knew every thing when I knew nothing."

"No," exclaimed Margaret, indignantly, and she rose quickly, and stood by the Countess with a haughtiness of manner which Beatrice had never before seen her assume; "the world knows nothing. If Agatha has been in error, she has had many wrongs to bear."

"But I could not tell them," said the Countess, reproachfully.

Margaret's transient anger was over; and the fears which had troubled her before the present meeting, again prevailed. "You must forgive me, Beatrice," she said, "if I am hasty. I do not complain of you, but of the harsh-judging world. I was prepared for some misunderstanding before I came, for I knew that Mrs. St. Aubyn was not likely to conceal her unfavourable opinions."

"I will not listen to Mrs. St. Aubyn, or to any one, dearest," replied the Countess. "I will hearken only to yourself. There can be no lips more true and pure than yours. Will you tell me all?"

Still Margaret hesitated; and Beatrice was vexed.

"And after all, you cannot trust me?" she said.

"I see nothing to call forth trust," replied Margaret; "I have no secret to confide, and it would but distress both you and me to recount the series of petty circumstances which have brought matters to their present state. Colonel Clive and Agatha were not happy together. After the child's death, Agatha's feelings were, from circumstances, much excited, and she left her home, and has hitherto kept to her determination of not seeing her husband again. Beatrice, you will not wish me to tell you more in detail?"

"And you?" said the Countess.

"Can you doubt me? Do you think I would not have made every effort to prevent the step?"

The Countess passed her hand before her eyes, and was silent. And this was the explanation? It was not such as she had expected.

"Beatrice, you are satisfied?" asked Margaret in a tone of painful uncertainty. The Countess's sense of justice reproached her. Yes, she ought to be satisfied; and she looked at Margaret and said that she was. But the bitterness of a half explanation, a partial satisfaction, who does not know it? Margaret judged the Countess by herself; she thought that if she had still any lingering cause of annoyance or suspicion she would tell it. But she did not understand the spirit of the De Lisles. Beatrice was exacting with regard to confidence; and the simple explanation was not enough to undo the effect of Lucia's insinuations. Margaret might have told this before; and now she did not seem aware that Beatrice had any right to complain. The Countess was too proud to suggest that Margaret had been wrong, and, putting on an air of unconcern, she said, "And this, then, is the great mystery!"

"Why will you speak of mysteries, Beatrice,

when you know that I never intended to make any? But you shall have no cause to find fault with me again; to see you annoyed adds tenfold to my other trials."

Beatrice was softened by the confession, and her countenance resumed more of its natural expression.

"You shall hear every thing else," said Margaret, struggling against the shame which would even then have induced her to be silent. "My father has just now to contend with very serious difficulties. One of my brothers has given him great anxiety; he has been very extravagant, and we must be the sufferers. The money which would have provided for my mother and for all of us must be applied to the present emergency; and unless my father should recover, and be able to pursue his profession again, there must be some great change made by us. We cannot continue to live as we are now doing."

Whilst Margaret spoke, her faltering accents betraying the struggle of her mind, the Countess's generous nature had been recovering its rightful sway. She was grieved that she had, as it were, extorted this family history, and the punishment was found in the consciousness that Margaret must suffer, and that she could not offer her assistance. She clasped Margaret's hand with the warmth and tenderness of their first affection, and said, "Yours is a hard lot, my own Margaret, always to suffer for the faults of others."

"I would not call it hard, Beatrice," replied Margaret, whilst, as repressed sorrow gained the mastery over forced composure, her tears fell fast; "God knows, I would say it from my heart, that no trials can be greater than I deserve; but care seems to have come upon me suddenly, early, and I am too weak to bear it rightly."

"It cannot be so with your principles," said Beatrice.

Margaret's face told the chord of misery which had been touched. "Religion! that is the worst of all," she said in a low voice, and she leant her forehead upon the corner of the sofa, too unhappy to continue the conversation.

"And you are not yet satisfied," said the Countess at length, with an accent of impatience, which Margaret was too much absorbed to observe, "after all the questions have been explained."

"I may be when I have seen Father Andrea."

"Still doubtful, Margaret? Oh, when will doubt cease?"

The half-subdued distrust was rising again. Margaret seemed to have reserve upon all points.

"I dare not think when they will cease, or how, Beatrice," said Margaret, raising her head, and speaking in a tone of deep anguish; "my peace will be death to the happiness of a friend whom I have dearly loved."

"A friend! who? — what?"

"My uncle," replied Margaret, "the truest and best friend whom I had ever known till I knew you. He was my adviser in all things; a clergyman of the English Church. He has been ill; he is only just recovered, and when he hears, as he must hear, of my doubts, the consequences must be upon my head."

"It has been thus in all cases, dearest," said the Countess, relieved at the voluntary mention of Mr. Sutherland. "It is the sacrifice which all are called to make who would relinquish error for truth."

"And if it should not be truth, Beatrice?"

Margaret's voice was almost sepulchral. Standing on the verge of the abyss, her eyes were for a moment opened to behold the darkness, which imagi-

nation had so lately converted into light. The Countess could little brook the suggestion.

"Your mind is distracted by family anxieties, dearest Margaret," she said. "When they are over you will see every thing plainly."

"And when will that be, Beatrice?"

"Soon, I trust, very soon. These trials come to every one at some time or other; but if we have faith, there is always found a way of escape."

A faint smile passed over Margaret's face. "You speak like one who has always had wealth at command. Faith may give us comfort, but we are never told that it will give us money."

"Our daily bread," replied the Countess.

"Yes, but not luxuries; and we have lived in luxury, and I fear have been unthankful."

"You have not, Margaret."

"Yes, indeed; I as well as others. I have received my blessings as things of course. I have scarcely realized that they were blessings till now, when it seems that I must lose them."

"But it cannot be," exclaimed the Countess, who, totally unused to anything approaching to privation, except so far as it was enforced by the discipline of her Church, could not understand the extent of Margaret's fears.

"It must, and will be," said Margaret. "If my father cannot provide for us, we must provide for ourselves."

A natural impulse would at that instant have hurried the Countess to the sacrifice of her whole fortune to save Margaret from privation; but the vow by which she was bound checked even the common expressions of sympathy. "Oh, Margaret," she exclaimed, "if we were but sisters."

"We may be in affection," replied Margaret, "and that will make all my troubles light."

"No; not all. Margaret, I cannot bear that you should suffer."

"Do not be impatient for me, dearest Beatrice," said Margaret, in a tone of gentle reproach; "that would indeed grieve me."

"But can you believe that I feel for you in every thing; that I would be to you as a sister really?"

"I am sure you will be to me as a sister for the future, as you have been already. I can never be grateful enough for your friendship."

The allusion to gratitude stung the Countess to the quick. "Margaret," she said, "if we were sisters, all would be one with us, home, wealth, all things."

Margaret could scarcely avoid putting the natural construction upon this remark. She was pained both for Beatrice and herself, and tried to evade the subject by again expressing her sense of the Countess's affection; but becoming confused, her words were awkward, and she was misunderstood.

"You have no reason to thank me, Margaret, for any thing," said the Countess, with a look of great distress. "I have done nothing to call forth gratitude."

"Nothing! — when you have loved me?"

"Love in words; but the most indifferent of your acquaintances has more power to be a real comfort to you than I have."

As she said this, Beatrice forced herself to look at Margaret, in the faint hope that some glimpse of the truth might have dawned upon her. But it was not so.

Margaret was silent and perplexed, and the Countess, unable longer to endure the restraint, continued: "Margaret, it has been the great charm of our intercourse that you have been able to place

yourself in my position, to understand me entirely; but it is not so now."

"Not understand you, Beatrice? do you think that any trials can disunite us in heart?"

"Never, never: yet there are circumstances —" she waited for an instant, and then resting her head upon Margaret's shoulder, added impetuously, "Margaret, try to feel as I feel. I knelt by my husband's bed when he was dying. We spoke of the interests of the Church. His heart was given to it, and we were about to part on earth for ever. I pledged myself that my paltry wealth should never be alienated from it;—that it should never be given to one who was not of the true faith. God forgive me that I would recall that solemn vow!" As the last words were spoken, a voice seemed to repeat in the Countess's ear: "Try her, test her, see if she will love you still." It was as the whisper of an evil spirit. Beatrice turned with shame and horror from the doubt; yet the next moment her eyes were fixed upon Margaret. And there was a change; yes, strange and unaccountable as it might seem, Margaret's countenance was clouded as it had not been since the conversation began. She said much of thanks, affection, full confidence; but her manner was constrained, and stopping suddenly, she rose and said that she must go.

Beatrice watched her in dismay, and the jealous whisper arose again—"See if she will love you still."

"I will be here again, dear Beatrice, the day after to-morrow, if possible," said Margaret, in a voice of forced composure.

"It must be then; I am to be in town the following afternoon."

"Going?" and Margaret's face became very pale.

"But for a few days only. I must satisfy Father

Andrea by consulting a physician. Do not look so frightened, dear love; there is but little the matter."

Margaret retained the hand which was placed in hers. The thin fingers seemed already to give cause for alarm. She gazed upon the Countess anxiously, and Beatrice smiled a sweet sad smile. "We shall meet again soon, and be happier, Margaret," she said.

Margaret did not echo the hope: the shade of troubled thought gathered again upon her brow, and without seeking for further information as to the Countess's movements, she gave her one long silent kiss and left her.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT was the cause of Margaret's discomposure? The Countess's passing and most painful suspicion was far indeed from assigning it to the right source, and but for Lucia's hints the idea could never have arisen. But the fact which had been told so naturally struck Margaret as throwing an additional, and a most distressing difficulty, in her path. Once a Romanist, and the Countess, it was certain, would be ready, even eager to place her beyond the reach of her present anxieties. And Margaret could have accepted any favour, and yet have received the testimony of conscience that she had not been for a moment influenced by the expectation of it. But the cold, unsympathising, censorious world, what would it say? If she were to refuse assistance, she would offend the Countess, and deprive herself of the means of being useful to her family. If she were to accept it, a slur would be cast upon the motives of her conversion, which would do injury to her own character, and to the cause of religion. On either side, she might be met by misconstruction; yet Margaret did not allow the fear of the future to rest upon her mind. Once again in the open air, and left to the freedom of her own reflections, she tried to be thankful that the meeting which she had dreaded had given her no exact cause to suspect the Countess of any change of feeling towards her. "No cause," she said at first; but upon consideration, she was more inclined to

say, "slight cause;" for some alteration there undoubtedly was. Beatrice was less trusting than she had been,—more desirous of explanations; and when Margaret went over the conversation in detail, she could not quite convince herself that the Countess was satisfied. But the next interview she resolved should make every thing clear; she would be more open about Agatha, for Beatrice was a person to whom nothing less than the most perfect candour was acceptable; and, for the future, every grief and every joy, however secret, should be shared with her. Yet even when arrived at that determination, Margaret was still oppressed and unhappy. It was a most glorious afternoon, in the season when spring appears in its greatest beauty, when every tree is either bursting forth into leaf, or spreading shadows from the masses of its already dense foliage; and often in the days of her childhood had Margaret rejoiced with ecstacy at the sight of such beauty; still oftener in youth had she at such times indulged in romantic imaginations; and with a soberer yet truer delight had she afterwards shared with her uncle the reverent gratitude with which a Christian learns to appreciate the wonderful works of the Almighty. But the power to minister to "a mind diseased," is a power belonging to God alone; and Margaret pursued her walk homewards as insensible to the loveliness spread forth for her enjoyment, as if she had been threading the dark dull alleys of the metropolis.

She entered the house with a persuasion that something untoward must have happened during her absence, for she was growing superstitious as to fancies and forebodings. Brighter countenances, however, were awaiting her than she had seen for many days. Mrs. Percival smiled, and held out a letter, and the children jumping round her, clapped

their hands in glee, as they exclaimed —"Uncle Henry is to be here to-night!" "My uncle!"— Margaret's heart beat till she was almost faint; but no one noticed her. She sat down in a chair and read the few lines announcing Mr. Sutherland's intended arrival. He had landed the day before, and slept at the house of a friend; but he was longing, he said, to see them all, and hoped that nothing would prevent him from being with them by dinner-time. They would find him looking extremely well, quite a different person from what he was when he left England. "Thank God for that," said Margaret, earnestly, as she folded the note, and gave it again to her mother. She had more cause than any one to be thankful that Mr. Sutherland had gained strength to bear all which might await him.

"My dear Margaret, you look very tired," said Mrs. Percival. "I am afraid you have been walking too far, or perhaps it is the heat. It has become very suddenly warm."

"No, mamma, thank you, I am not tired. Don't you think I shall have time to go and see Miss Debrett, and tell her the news?"

"If you wish it; but I don't know that there is any occasion to give yourself the trouble. Besides, your uncle may come during your absence."

The very thing which Margaret desired. The waiting, and listening, and seeing every one else in a state of happy expectation, would be unendurable. She was gone before Mrs. Percival had time to express surprise at her thoughtfulness; but as she walked down the road her ear was strained to catch every sound. A stage-coach passed; it came from the wrong direction, yet Margaret looked at both the outside and inside passengers, to be quite sure that some unforeseen accident had not

caused her uncle to travel from the north when he intended to arrive from the south. Miss Debrett hurried to the door when she peeped over the blind and saw Margaret standing there.

"It was very provoking," she observed, "that the latch should be always down when Margaret came; but Susan was gone out on a little errand, and there were so many idle people about that she thought it safest; not that any one was likely to do her harm, but still it was best."

"According to Falstaff's notion, that 'discretion is the better part of valour,'" said Margaret.

"Yes, my dear, exactly. Falstaff, that is in Shakespeare, is it not? I used to learn a good deal out of Shakespeare, when I was at school; but come in and take off your bonnet, and let me say how d'ye do to you."

Margaret entered the parlour, though she would not take off her bonnet, "because," she said, "she had only a few minutes to spare."

"Always busy, I know. It is the way with young people; and very right too. If you are not busy now, my dear, you never will be when you are as old as I am. You have been walking to-day, I suppose?"

"Yes, a little distance." Margaret was more averse than ever from mentioning her visits to Henningsley. "It is nearly dinner-time now, and I should not have come so late, but that I was sure you would like to know that we are expecting my uncle this evening."

"Mr. Sutherland? Well, that is delightful! and he is come back quite well, I hope."

"We hope so, too. He gives a very good account of himself; but then he is always sanguine."

"And you must be all quite happy. I dare say

your poor father is in spirits again at the notion of seeing him?"

"I dare say he is, but I did not go to his room before I came over here: I thought you would be vexed, if you did not know at once."

"Perhaps I might have been: not that I should have thought you unkind, my dear, that I never could do. I was writing about you only this very day to my cousin Anne Duncan. She talks of coming over to see me soon, for she never can rest, she says, till she has persuaded me to go and live with her at Eastlake."

"I imagined that notion was quite given up," said Margaret.

"So did I; but Anne always was persevering when she set her heart upon any thing. You know we were brought up together; and then she married, and her husband died; and she says it seems lonely, and she is sure I should like it; but it is all a mistake."

"She should come and live here with you," said Margaret.

"So she would if Staunton were like Eastlake; but that you know it is not. Anne goes to church every day there, and has some poor people to attend to; and she helps to make clothes for them, and so she says her time passes happily."

"But she could go and see poor people here," observed Margaret.

"That would not be the same thing, my dear; Anne always liked to be told what to do, and she says it makes all the difference whether she does what the clergyman wishes, or just what she fancies right herself. It is more in her way, and she takes more interest in it. In fact I know she would not come here for the world."

"Then things must remain as they are, I suppose," said Margaret, in an absent tone.

"Yes, so they must." Yet Miss Debrett's assent was not thoroughly hearty. Her wishes had been excited by the description of her cousin Anne's regular useful life at Eastlake. It seemed a privilege to hallow every day by public prayer; and it might be possible, even for one so weak as herself to do some good, under proper guidance. "I don't know how it might be if it were not for all of you," she continued; "perhaps — but it is no use thinking about it, is it? You are not going away, and I never could be happy to leave you."

"Then I wish Mrs. Duncan would not write to you about it," said Margaret, trying to give her attention; "I am sure it only makes you unhappy."

"No, my dear, it does not; but I wish sometimes that things were a little different here. Staunton and Deering are both alike about the services; though I am sure I ought not to say any thing against my clergyman, for I hear he does a great deal of good amongst the poor; and I dare say Mr. Stanley does too, only we don't know so much about it." With her late change of opinions, Margaret had imbibed a bitterness against Mr. Stanley, which sometimes extended itself further, even to the Church of which she was still a member, and now she answered harshly, that the English clergy had a fearful amount of neglect to answer for. Miss Debrett looked up surprised.

"I dare say you are right, my dear Margaret. To be sure you must be, you are so clever; but I heard some one say, one day, that clergymen are but men, and that we find fault with them as if they were born angels."

"I was wrong," said Margaret, gravely, and hastily changing the conversation, she referred again to

Mr. Sutherland's return, saying that it was possible, in consequence, she might not be able to call and see Miss Debrett the next day. Margaret did not justly estimate the pleasure her visits gave, for Miss Debrett's countenance fell at the announcement, and with a feeling of repining she reverted to Eastlake, and observed that one good thing in living there would be that she should never be in want of a companion. Margaret did not notice the remark. Unselfish though the was, yet her heart was then too full to share another's uneasiness. She looked at her watch, and saw that it wanted only twenty minutes to the dinner hour. If Mr. Sutherland came at all, he must certainly be arrived. Miss Debrett would on no account detain her when she heard the time. She even hurried her away, lest her mother might be vexed, and only twice reminded her not to forget to mention to Mrs. Percival what Anne Duncan had said about Eastlake.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Mr. Sutherland is just arrived, ma'am," said Symonds, in answer to Margaret's inquiring glance at the packages in the hall. Margaret recognised the portmanteau and carpet-bag: they seemed strangely natural; like unchanged, familiar faces, when we ourselves, through suffering and trial, have become almost different beings. Philip was watching for her in the lobby, and exclaimed —

"Here she is! Uncle Henry, she is come back!"

Margaret listened for her uncle's voice. He spoke low; but the gentle yet deep tone fell mournfully upon her ear. Had she ever loved any one as well?" She paused on the staircase; for, in the greatness of her agitation, physical strength seemed failing her. In another moment Mr. Sutherland's impatience had brought him to meet her. Margaret received his blessing, and returned his fervent kiss, without the power of uttering one word of welcome. A sense of suffocation oppressed her; the struggle of joy and misery. Mr. Sutherland returned to the drawing-room, and Margaret, recovering herself quickly, went with him; and with a life and eagerness which few would have believed to be strained, joined in the questions and remarks which flowed from the whole party. The questions Mr. Sutherland was scarcely allowed time to answer; and the remarks were at length stopped by Mrs. Percival's positive command that every one should go and dress for dinner, or they would all be too late. Margaret was hastening away with the rest; but Mr. Sutherland was not willing to let her pass so

easily, and stopping her as she was about to leave the room, said—

"One word, Margaret." Margaret trembled, and glanced round the apartment, hoping that some one might be present; but they were alone. "I had not time to answer your last letter about Agatha—I was too much hurried; and I knew we should probably meet very soon. You must have thought it unkind, I am afraid."

"Oh, no! never. Nothing that you could do could be unkind."

"Yet some persons might have considered it so; but you know me too well to doubt how I accord with all you feel. It is a miserable case, and must have been a shock to you in every way."

"Except that you always prophesied evil," said Margaret, satisfied at finding that the conversation was in no way to refer to herself.

"So I did; but I am not certain that I was prepared for this. Yet we will hope still, Margaret. In this and in every thing, we will put our trust where we ought, and hope."

What right have I to trust? thought Margaret when she went to dress; and she wandered off into abstruse speculations as to the foundation of trust or faith; how it could be available, when the grounds on which it rested were unsafe; how far false doctrine and true faith were compatible; the extent of guilt that attached to erroneous creeds; and other questions of a like kind, which made her confess the impotency of human reason, and long for the repose even of credulity. They followed her when she joined the family party, until the mixture of abstraction in her own thoughts, and occasional warm interest in her uncle's conversation, attracted notice. Then she exerted herself more, talked, and even laughed; but the laugh was dis-

cordant to her own ear, and had in it something startling to Mr. Sutherland's. He had looked forward to this meeting for weeks, ever since he had been told that he might return to England without danger. Amongst the many anticipated pleasures in being restored to his home, the chief was the delight of seeing Margaret. Now she sat near him, the same Margaret, with the clear bright eye, the dark braided hair, the winning smile, which flashed like sunlight over her face. And there were the same tones, the same quick observations, the questions, evincing her peculiar depth of thought, and the half-sadness which mingled with her most joyous moods. Yes, it was the same Margaret:—yet Mr. Sutherland looked again, and it was another; silent, almost moody, with a gloomy brow, a pallid cheek, and eyes, the lustre of which was dimmed by a gathering tear. Margaret fancied herself on the watch against betraying her unhappiness; but Mr. Sutherland was too well acquainted with her natural manner to be deceived. Before the evening was over he was as well aware as herself of the effort which her assumed gaiety cost her. It was no surprise to him that she should be depressed; but it was a disappointment that she should be so apparently overpowered. He had calculated upon strength of principle supporting her under trial, and he was grieved to perceive that it was insufficient. Mr. Sutherland had himself many anxious thoughts about the present and future prospects of the family; but they were earthly cares, and he could cast them entirely upon God. So he had hoped Margaret would have done. In one case, the most distressing of all, she had herself told him that there was much to give comfort. Illness and leisure for thought were recalling Dr. Percival's mind from the turmoil of life, and fixing it upon the great truths,

which alone are realities. Margaret had perceived symptoms of this change many weeks before, and now, as day by day the hope of her father's recovery grew less, she found in it her greatest consolation. In several letters she had mentioned it as a reason for desiring her uncle's return, for she thought her father might be at ease with him, and might be led by him to speak upon subjects which other persons would be unwilling to approach. Mr. Sutherland had hastened his journey in consequence; but Margaret's manner did not indicate satisfaction at his presence. After the first warmth of the meeting was over, she seemed rather to avoid him than not.

The following day Mr. Sutherland asked for a conversation, which might give him an insight into the state of the family affairs; and Margaret did not hesitate to tell him every thing. She spoke resignedly of her father, — hopefully of Craven; she was trying to be cheerful about Agatha, and, from her observations, it was clear that her strength of mind would be sufficient to enable her to bear up against any pecuniary embarrassments. If it were necessary, she stated plainly that she would provide for herself; she would be a governess, or take pupils, or exert herself in any way that might be thought best. The consciousness of talent without its being accompanied by conceit rendered her in a degree independent of the world. Mr. Sutherland was satisfied in his expectations of Margaret's energy; but there was something in all this which did not quite please him. There was more of depression and indifference than of resignation. Except with regard to her father, Margaret in no way touched upon religion. With apparent candour there was real reserve. He tried to lead her mind to the thoughts which were a consolation to him-

self, and Margaret listened and agreed; but he could see that she was impatient. She did not enter into his remarks as she would once have done; and how could it be otherwise? Whilst Mr. Sutherland spoke of faith, and humility, of membership with the Church, and fellowship in suffering with Him who is its Head, Margaret was thinking of Father Andrea, and struggling against the miserable uncertainty, whether he or her uncle would be, in truth, her right guide.

The visit to the Countess the following day would, she hoped, more fully settle her mind. If Father Andrea were not likely to return soon, she determined to write to him, and entreat him to furnish her with arguments clearly put forth, which might enable her to convince Mr. Sutherland that her doubts had not been hastily formed; and then she would tell all. That was the point upon which all her wishes were now concentrated, — to be relieved of the burden of concealment; no longer to shrink from her uncle's gaze, and tremble, like a coward, at the sound of his voice. To acknowledge every thing to her father and mother, to bear their censure, their reproaches, even it might be, their anguish. For Margaret could not hide from herself that the step which she was by degrees bringing herself to contemplate as possible, might be a source of greater misery to her family than any other calamity. She had before trusted that her mother would bear with the idea calmly; but, as the moment of confession approached, consequences unforeseen hitherto forced themselves upon her.

Yet there would be the spirit of martyrdom to support her. If she were finally to resolve upon entering the Romish Church, it would be with the certainty of having sacrificed all her family happiness for the sake of religion. The Countess's affec-

tion might, in some way, be a recompense ; but it could not save her from great suffering. Margaret, striving after perfect sincerity of heart, endeavoured to determine every thing without reference to Beatrice. The visions of happiness which she had once cherished floated before her ; but they were rejected as temptations that might lead her astray ; and at this point she believed herself unbiassed by any love except the love of truth. It might be so ; but there was another question upon which she did not enter ; by what steps of a hasty judgment, and a too vivid imagination, and a weak impatience of imperfection in the English Church, that point had been attained?

The question was to be decided sooner than was anticipated.—Late at night, when the family had retired to rest, Margaret was sitting in her room reading the life of a Romish saint : an ivory crucifix, one of the small presents she had occasionally received from the Countess, stood on the table before her.

Margaret was in general careful not to allow any signs of her secret opinions to appear ; but at this hour there was no fear of interruption ; and, forgetful of weariness, she continued to read until her candle had burnt low, and she suddenly awoke to the consciousness that she was no further advanced in preparing for her night's rest than when she first came to her room. A lamp was generally kept burning in the hall. Margaret stole down stairs to fetch it, fearing every moment lest the creaking of the steps, or some unlucky accident might disturb her father ; and returning with the lamp, she had reached the lobby when her foot slipped over a marble which Philip had accidentally dropped, and she fell. The lamp was extinguished, the glass broken, and, on attempting to rise, Margaret found

that her ankle was slightly sprained. She was vexed at her folly for having been induced to sit up; but she trusted no one had been aroused by the noise; and all that could be done, was to creep back to her room as quickly and as quietly as she could. One person, however, had been disturbed. Mr. Sutherland was equally late in retiring to rest; and, before Margaret had recovered from her alarm, he came to her, begging to know if she was hurt, and insisting upon helping her to her room. Margaret laughed, and called it a trifle, and declared they should alarm the house; but she was really in pain, and Mr. Sutherland would not leave her. Margaret had no thought beyond the annoyance of the accident; she did not consider whether there was or was not any reason for objecting to her uncle's kindness; but she had no sooner entered her room than her eye rested upon the crucifix. Would he notice it? She hoped not; he was so busy with her. It did not seem likely that he would remark any thing; and Mr. Sutherland did not do so to Margaret's knowledge: he waited only until he was certain she was not seriously hurt, and then bade her good night; but when he returned to his own chamber, the fact that the crucifix was standing upon the table recurred to him. It seemed strange —unlike the tastes and opinions which Margaret had sometimes expressed to him; but it was impossible that he could suspect the truth, and he went to rest without any misgiving that he had seen that which Margaret would, at almost any hazard, have then kept from him. The next morning Margaret exerted herself beyond what was prudent. Her foot was a little painful; but she knew that any complaint would be followed by an order to lie upon the sofa, and a walk to Henningsley would be out of the question. Mrs.

Percival, however, perceived directly Margaret came into the breakfast-room that something was amiss. "She was lame. What was the cause of it?"

Margaret answered lightly; but Mr. Sutherland would not let the subject drop, for he was resolved that Margaret should take care of herself. The accident of the preceding night was narrated, much to Margaret's annoyance, and she found herself doomed to a day of rest. What was now to be done? To see the Countess was indispensable to her happiness: no letter would satisfy her in the same way; for Margaret, besides her wish to clear up every doubt that might yet rest on the Countess's mind, had a secret misgiving of some change, some trial that was at hand, which made her long to have an interview once more before they parted. There was a hope that the Countess might be able to come to her, whilst Mr. Sutherland was absent in the afternoon; but this was doubtful, and might cause awkward observations. She tried to be cheerful in manner; but her spirits drooped, and Mr. Sutherland's fears, lest she was suffering, made her only the more sad. She was deceiving him, though unintentionally.

"I should scarcely have thought you would have taken a day's quiet so much to heart, Margaret," said Mrs. Percival, observing her look of passive dejection.

"It is not the rest, mamma," and Margaret forced herself to smile; "but it upsets all one's plans."

"Our walk, for instance," said Mr. Sutherland; "such as we used to have in the olden time."

Margaret could not tell what to answer; she had never intended to walk with him.

"You would have gone to Henningsley, I suppose," said Mrs. Percival, "as the Countess is to be in London so soon?"

Mr. Sutherland looked up rather quickly.

"I—I don't know. The Countess is not to be away long," said Margaret, hating herself as she spoke, for her disingenuousness.

"The Confessor has been absent some time, I believe," continued Mrs. Percival.

"Yes; I cannot say exactly how long," Margaret answered shortly, and then made some observations upon the weather; but she could not divert the conversation.

"I did not know the Countess Novera was here so much," said Mr. Sutherland.

"Indeed! I should have supposed, though you have had only one good correspondent, that you would have heard more than enough about her. Margaret and she are the greatest friends possible."

Margaret's confusion was not now to be hidden. Mr. Sutherland noticed it in silent wonder.

"It is quite strange the Countess's fancy for her," persisted Mrs. Percival; "and they exchange books, and write notes, and make presents."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Margaret; "the Countess scarcely ever gave me any thing."—She stopped, remembering the crucifix.

"Well, my dear, I will not be quite positive about the presents; but, at any rate, you are always together, and I do not see why you should make a mystery of it. There is nothing to be ashamed of."

Mrs. Percival rose from the table, and Margaret left the room with her, Mr. Sutherland remained behind in a reverie. Something in Margaret was different,—he could not determine what. Why should she have kept back any thing which interested her? He was so unsuspicious, as not even then to perceive the possible reason for her reserve, although fully aware of the Countess's religion.

He thought the acquaintance undesirable, and determined to inquire more into it; but this was all. There was, however, a weight upon his spirits after the conversation, and Margaret could not help perceiving it, as he came to her when she was lying on the sofa in the school-room before luncheon. She was feeling herself guilty and miserable. Those to whom she was bound by the most sacred ties of duty and affection, she was about to involve in suffering, — how great, if her doubts were to be followed by action, she could not trust herself to think. They talked for a little while upon the family affairs; but Margaret was impatient, for an unfinished note to the Countess was before her, entreating that Beatrice would come to her that afternoon. Mr. Sutherland saw that she was not interested, although the subjects brought forward were of an all-engrossing nature.

"I am disturbing you," he said at length, when he noticed her absent manner.

"Oh, no! not at all, but I must just finish this. It must be sent to-day."

"You have time enough," said Mr. Sutherland, "if it is for the London post."

"No."— Margaret was conscious that she was blushing, and added; "it is not meant for the London post at all."

Mr. Sutherland was chilled; the answer was unlike Margaret's usual candour. At that instant a servant came into the room, and inquired if the note for Henningsley was ready.

"It would be soon, and there was a parcel to go likewise." Margaret stretched out her hand for a volume which lay near her; but it was beyond her reach. She did not ask Mr. Sutherland for it; but he took it up, and his eye rested upon the title. It was the same which Margaret had been reading the

preceding evening, — the lives of Romish saints. Unsuspecting though he was, there were some coincidences which could not but attract his notice. The crucifix flashed upon his recollection. Margaret tried in vain to look unconcerned. The book was given in silence, and then she took up the pen to finish her note. Mr. Sutherland did not go away: he leaned against the mantel-piece in a musing attitude: yet his thoughts were even then very far from the truth. He had but an increased fear that the Countess Novera might be a dangerous acquaintance, and a wish to warn Margaret gently before she was much involved.

"Is the Countess here constantly?" he said, speaking rather abruptly.

"Not constantly, but generally," was the reply, whilst Margaret still went on writing.

"And you see a great deal of her?"

"Yes, — that is, sometimes."

"Is she a nice sort of person?"

"Very;" but the answer was not hearty, for Margaret was indignant that such a question should be put concerning one whom she was accustomed to believe almost angelic in purity and goodness.

"You never said any thing to me about her in your letters."

"Yes, indeed I did, several times. I remember particularly mentioning that I stayed there a week."

"What! at Henningsley? — a week with the Countess Novera? Are you so intimate?" exclaimed Mr. Sutherland in a tone of the utmost surprise, not unmingled with alarm. He thought again of the crucifix and the Romish book, and a vague suspicion crossed his mind that the Countess might have been tampering with Margaret's faith, though Margaret herself might not be aware of it.

"I do not remember the fact being named," he continued; "though, of course, it must have been my oversight; but I should suppose that it would have struck me, because of what passed about Henningsley when first the Countess arrived."

"You expressed an opinion against unequal friendships," said Margaret, trying to light a taper that she might hide her confusion.

"Yes, and also upon the danger of forming an intimacy with a Romanist. That would be to me a much greater objection than the other."

Margaret was going to put up the parcel without replying; but Mr. Sutherland laid his hand upon it: "I wish, Margaret, you would not ask the Countess for such books as these."

Margaret's head was bent down: she was acting an unworthy part. Perhaps this was the best moment for the confession to be made; but Father Andrea's arguments were needed to enable her to state clearly her grounds for doubt. "The books contain a great deal that is good," she answered, "and the Countess says they have been of the utmost use to her."

"And she is not then a worldly person?"

"Worldly! oh, if you did but know her." Enthusiasm for an instant conquered prudence, and Margaret's sparkling eye and eager exclamation made Mr. Sutherland aware that the subject was near her heart. He sat down by her, and said, gravely, but affectionately, "And why, Margaret, am I to hear so little of this new friend?"

"You would not understand, nor care about her," said Margaret, finding it impossible to maintain her reserve.

"Not care for her, if you did! You would not have said that, Margaret, before I left England."

"I am not altered," replied Margaret.

Mr. Sutherland expected her to continue; but her distress became evident, and tears rolled down her cheeks. Her uncle watched her anxiously, and as she would have turned away her face, he kissed her, and said, "Margaret, you used to tell me every thing."

Margaret longed to confess, but could not summon resolution. "I told you every thing when you could help me," she replied; "but you cannot do so now."

"Cannot!" repeated Mr. Sutherland; "is that indeed the case?"

Margaret closed her eyes, and prayed that strength might be given her. "If I have a secret," she said at length, "it can do you no good to know it before the time. Sorrow will come soon enough."

"Suspense, Margaret, is the keenest suffering."

Margaret knew this but too well. If she could only bring herself to own the truth, every after trial would be tolerable. "And you would love me always, through every thing?" she said, clasping her uncle's hand. Then as she saw the sudden paleness which overspread his face, she started up and exclaimed — "Yes, I knew, I said it would be worst with you."

"Margaret," replied Mr. Sutherland, recovering himself, "if you have erred in any way, I am the person to whom, next to your parents, you are bound to make the confession."

"It is not error," said Margaret, firmly: "it is truth; but I am too ignorant to convince you of it." She raised her eyes to his, and her heart beat violently. What she then most earnestly desired was, that he might guess all that she would say; and Mr. Sutherland had a doubt, though the reality was too startling to be at once admitted into his mind. "If you could bear with me," continued Margaret, in a rapid tone, seeing that he did not speak. "You

would, if you knew my wretchedness. I have had no one to consult, and I have prayed to be guided aright. Only bear with me; do not turn away from me and hate me, though I may make you miserable for a time. Father Andrea has said that happiness will come to us all if we follow the truth." Margaret pronounced the confessor's name, and Mr. Sutherland's eyes were opened. The fearful agitation of his mind was betrayed by his countenance; but his voice, though low, was unshaken.

"Margaret, my poor child!" he said, as he placed his hand fondly upon her throbbing temples, "have they really been filling your mind with doubts?"

Margaret answered by leaning her head upon his shoulder, and crying bitterly.

"I did not seek it," she said, in a broken voice; "they did not try to teach me; but it has all come upon me by degrees. You must not think hardly of them, they are so good."

"And they have been talking to you, persuading you that they are right?" inquired Mr. Sutherland, impatient to ascertain whether the evil were more than a lately infused suspicion acting upon a tender conscience.

"Yes, showing me, — proving it. They are saints, — so much, much better than I am."

"Let them be who or what they may," exclaimed Mr. Sutherland, sternly, "they have done an evil work; but, Margaret, you must not hide any thing from me now. Tell me what it is they have taught you to believe."

"The English Church is not the true Church," said Margaret, speaking with difficulty; "indeed, it is not. It is wrong in so many ways; you may be safe, for you have faith in it, but I cannot be."

Mr. Sutherland passed his hand before his eyes. Grief and indignation struggled in his breast; yet

he strove against the latter, for it might be unjust. "And how long, Margaret, has this been going on?" he said. "When did they first begin to tamper with you?"

"I do not know; I can fix upon no time, though I have often tried. It has come gradually. Beatrice said but little to me at first; but I saw that she was unlike the world, and I loved her dearly. I felt myself inferior, and I saw it was religion which made her different."

"And you began, then, to inquire into her principles?"

"Sometimes. There was nothing to help me in the English Church. I seemed left to myself, and now and then I said so; and Beatrice told me more about her own Church, and explained things to me which had puzzled me; and Father Andrea was always saying that ours was an Act of Parliament Church. And when I declared it was not, he pointed out to me how the State interfered with it, and proved that it had no power in itself, and many things besides; and at last he convinced me. But it was my own will: he never forced the subject. I do not think he at all intended to make me change when he began."

A bitter smile passed over Mr. Sutherland's face; but the feeling which caused it was mastered in a moment. He endeavoured to forget Father Andrea, and think only of Margaret. "And all this time had you no thought that you were doing wrong?" he said, very gravely.

"There can be nothing wrong in searching after truth," replied Margaret, evading the question.

"But there may be in the manner of searching. The man who, upon the first impulse of disloyalty to his king, from a dissatisfaction with his government, throws himself into the enemy's camp, and

parleys with foreign chiefs, is a traitor. Margaret, we may be traitors to our Church."

Margaret looked extremely hurt, and said, "I thought you would be grieved, not angry."

"It is not anger," replied Mr. Sutherland, "God knows! But when doubts arose, had you no friend in whom you could confide? Was your uncle so entirely forgotten? and were there no guides in the English Church? Could you not recall the names of any saintly and learned men, Jewell, Sanderson, Hammond, Bull, Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, — hundreds who have studied the question thoroughly, and proved that the claims of Rome are unfounded?"

"I cannot tell—I do not understand," said Margaret, in a faltering voice; "I was carried on without thought; but the end has been that my eyes have been opened, and I know that the salvation of my soul is at stake."

Mr. Sutherland walked the room quickly.

"Of all persons," continued Margaret, with greater firmness, "you would be the last to counsel me against my conscience. That alone I must follow; and, come what may, I must abide the trial in patience."

As Margaret spoke, Mr. Sutherland's face became rigid in the effort to retain self-command; but when she paused he sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. Margaret could not be aware of the impression in his mind that the final step had been taken, and that her confession was intended to prepare him for the fact; but she saw the anguish which he was suffering, and she knew that the tears which his own griefs could never have extracted, were now shed for her. She sat trembling and silent, not venturing to explain herself further.

"Have I heard the worst?" he said at length,

looking up, and speaking in a changed, and scarcely audible tone. Margaret was frightened, and did not immediately answer; and the doubt became agony. "Speak, Margaret, speak! are you a Romanist?"

The question startled, almost shocked Margaret. "O no!—impossible!—how could it be, unknown to you?"

"Thank God! then there is still hope."

He seemed relieved from the immediate pressure of alarm, and his countenance resumed its wonted expression; but he was very pale, and Margaret noticed that his voice was faltering.

"I must be alone," he said, moving to leave the room; "I thought myself stronger than I am; but we will renew the subject by and by, and you must give me a patient hearing."

Margaret drew near, to ask his forgiveness for the pain she had caused. He put his hand upon her head — "God's blessing and pardon be with you, my child! you were never in greater need of them." He was going; but his eye glanced upon the parcel for the Countess, and he stopped. "Margaret, you were to have seen the Countess Novera to-day?"

"Yes, here; I could not go to her."

"But it must not be. There must be no interview with her; if not for your own sake, for mine."

A blank fell upon Margaret's heart. "Ask me any thing but that. To-morrow Beatrice will be far away."

"To-morrow will be too late. The duty of the present moment is all that is ours."

"But for one hour — it can neither add to, nor take from my conviction."

Mr. Sutherland's face again betokened intensity of fear and suspense. "Margaret," he said, in an

accent of sad reproach, "is your love for a stranger stronger than your love for me? But it is not for myself,—it is the love of truth, of the Church; it is the love of God, who is Himself Truth, which requires it."

"Truth!" repeated Margaret; "the Countess may know more of it than we do."

"Be it so," replied her uncle; "let her be gifted as an angel from heaven, for you there is but one duty. You have thrown yourself into the hands of Romanists; before it is too late, you must hearken to the teaching of your own Church."

"I only wish," said Margaret, "struggling to be calm, "to see her once more before she leaves Henningsley. There is a heavy sense of coming evil upon my spirits. You can little tell how wretched I must be without it."

Deep affection and pity were in the tone of Mr. Sutherland's reply, but his words were imperative as before. "My dear, dear child, if there were any other way, — if it were not a question of such unutterable importance! — but you are blinded, you cannot see your danger: Follow your own will, and may Heaven avert the consequences!"

Margaret could not resist the earnestness of his manner. She tried to collect her thoughts; but it was not in her power. Mr. Sutherland awaited her decision patiently, and, after a great struggle, it was given.

"I put myself into your hands, but for the present only. I must think whether you are right hereafter."

Her hand shook as she seated herself at her desk, and wrote a few short lines explaining the reasons which detained her at home, but expressing no wish to see the Countess before she set off for London. "Let it be kept till late," she said, hurriedly, "and

there will be no fear. Beatrice is now expecting me."

Mr. Sutherland thanked her, and once more blessed her fervently; but Margaret was too miserable to be comforted. She hid her face from the light, and when her uncle left her, intreated, as the only favour which could now be granted, that he would persuade her mother to leave her undisturbed in her own chamber for the next few hours.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Countess Novera had even less satisfaction than Margaret, in reflecting upon what had passed between them. If she had been alive to suspicion before, she was not less so now. Mystery there still appeared to be; reserve where affection, in the Countess's opinion, required there should be none. Lucia's hateful insinuations returned again and again. They were rejected by the Countess's generous nature; but they could not be quite repelled. Margaret had not entered fully into her sister's case; she had not expressed herself as strongly as Beatrice herself would have done; she had only once alluded to her uncle, and when the Countess had confided to her the vow which bound her to dispose of her property according to strict limitations, Margaret's manner had suddenly and unaccountably changed. All these were symptoms from which a prejudiced mind might draw an unfavourable conclusion; and Beatrice was not free from prejudice. Distrust had long been working in her mind; and now, aided by the impetuosity of her temper, and the exacting nature of her affection, it succeeded in warping her judgment. Pride made her strive to conceal the effect which the interview had produced; but Lucia was too keen-sighted not to discover it. The Countess appeared in the drawing-room in the afternoon, and Lucia proposed reading aloud, but Beatrice could not attend. She took up her work, and then threw it aside;

turned over her portfolio; but, as she caught sight of Margaret's sketch for the school-house, closed it with a heavy sigh. By degrees a flush gathered upon her cheek, and her temples began to throb, and by the time the evening had closed in, it was very evident that she was suffering from an attack of fever. Lucia was really anxious, and persuaded her to go to bed. She would willingly have remained herself in the room to watch till she was asleep, but Beatrice could scarcely endure her presence. In the agitation of her spirits,—weak, both physically and mentally,— she fancied that if Lucia were away, her mind would again sink into repose. It was the consciousness of her jealousy, she thought, of her moodiness and discontent, which was oppressive. Alone, she could be happy; but in solitude came the doubt of Margaret's truth and love, and Beatrice tossed from side to side during the weary hours of the long night, seeking for that confidence in human affection which, if deceived in Margaret, she imagined she could never again expect to enjoy. The next day was one of weakness and irritation; the mind acting upon the body, and the body unfitting the mind for self-command. But the Countess refused every suggestion of medical advice, and remained by herself the whole morning. Lucia was conscious that she was wretched, and it grieved her; for the love which she professed was sincere, though selfish. But she could bear to see Beatrice suffer now, in the hope, that, when once this English affection were subdued, her own place in the Countess's heart would be restored. The hope, however, had no foundation. A capricious temper which disturbs the equanimity of our home life is less endurable than many more serious faults; and Beatrice wrote to Father Andrea before she left her room, to urge upon him the necessity of

providing for Lucia's return: with, or against her consent, there would now be no question. The morrow came. There is almost always a hope of something happier or better in a new day, and Beatrice, after a few hours' sleep, rose more refreshed than she had anticipated, and more inclined to look favourably upon the world, whilst reproaching herself for her injustice towards Margaret. The morning was occupied in preparations for the journey to London, and care for some of the poor people; and in the afternoon, Margaret was to be with her again. Beatrice, upon consideration, settled in her own mind that it would be wise to do away with all doubt, by being more unreserved herself. She might, in this way, overcome Margaret's shyness, if it were nothing more; and, by clearing up every seeming cause of distrust, convince Lucia that she had been speaking under a wrong impression. Hope was again uppermost in her mind, and there was a bright cheerfulness in her countenance, as she sat in her boudoir, awaiting Margaret's arrival, and employing herself in finishing a purse which was to be given her before they parted. But the minutes and half-hours wore away, and no Margaret came. Lucia knocked at the door once or twice under pretence of wishing to speak with her, but, in reality, to see whether she was alone. She made no observation at first; but when it grew late in the afternoon, and the Countess started at her entrance, and stepped forward as if expecting to meet some one she loved, and then sunk back on the sofa disappointedly, Lucia's face expressed inward satisfaction, as she remarked, —"Miss Percival is late this afternoon; she must have been particularly engaged not to be here this last day."

"She has been detained; she will come," said

the Countess; and there was no doubt in her tone, though there was in Lucia's smile.

"I am going for a walk in the park, probably I shall meet Miss Percival," said Lucia, entering the room again, as the time-piece struck half after four.

"Yes, you may—I dare say you will, for she must be here soon;" but the certainty was not as great as before; and, when Lucia was gone, the Countess stood at the window with the natural credulity of impatience, the fond persuasion that by looking she could hasten Margaret's movements. Lucia went for her solitary walk tolerably well satisfied. She was nearly certain, from the Countess's manner on the previous day, that the interview with Margaret had not thoroughly pleased her. Perhaps they had differed; and Margaret's absence might be the consequence of resentment. Lucia wished Margaret no evil, at least not what she would have called evil, but the thought that this might have been the case, was a salve to her jealousy, which made her spirits rise. She saw no signs of Margaret, and heard nothing of her from the labourers or at the Lodge; and when she returned to the house, the Countess was watching disconsolately the deepening shades of evening, grieving and wondering still over Margaret's absence.

"No Miss Percival yet?" said Lucia, in a pitying, yet slightly sarcastic tone: "then she will not come at all."

"Her father must be worse, I fear," said the Countess; "but in that case she would have written."

"Yes, or sent word: it has never happened before, I think."

"Never; there must be some great cause for it, I am sure."

"And you so unwell, and going away," added

Lucia: "it is extremely strange." She hoped to find out from the Countess's manner whether her suspicions were correct, and they had parted in anger; but Beatrice evinced nothing but eagerness, and said, that if she did not hear soon, she should send to inquire the cause; "Dr. Percival was in such a very precarious state, he might be very much worse."

"How dreadful for his family!" observed Lucia.

"Yes; poor Margaret!" the Countess gave a deep sigh, and added in an under voice—"few persons can have more to make them unhappy."

"Miss Percival looked ill yesterday," said Lucia.

"Did you think so?" asked Beatrice, in an anxious tone. "When did you see her?"

"I met her in the hall just as she arrived. It struck me particularly, because in general she seems much better and happier when she is here."

The Countess mused for a few moments, and then said, "It is strange, very strange, indeed! I think I must send."

Lucia did not offer to ring the bell, for she was angry at the Countess's uneasiness.

"Miss Percival has reason to be fond of Henningsley," she said; "she will find no such confidence elsewhere."

"Perhaps not," replied Beatrice, with dignity, "for there can be few persons who know as well as I do how truly she deserves it."

She moved away from the window, intending to put a stop to the conversation; but her eye rested for an instant upon Lucia's incredulous face; and it brought anew to her recollection the taunt with which a former conversation had concluded; the warning to test Margaret's disinterestedness. How willingly would she have proved to Lucia that her words had been an unfounded calumny! But Mar-

garet's cold abstracted manner, the change which had so suddenly come over her, made her pause, — she must wait and see Margaret once more before she could venture to own to Lucia that the test had been applied. It could not be that Lucia was right, and that Margaret's affection was but a mask for selfish objects; but it was not yet possible to prove that she was wrong.

The lingering twilight died away, the last line of golden light faded into a misty grey, and the crescent moon shone cloudless in the dark heavens. Then the Countess's hope was over. Margaret could not come. Lucia had left her, and she was alone. She no longer doubted that it would be well to write; but the comfort which she could have found in the occupation was over. Suspicion was again busy with its whispers. The Countess ordered a lamp, sent word to Lucia that she would join her in the drawing-room, but that she could not then be interrupted, and sat down to her writing-table. The first words were scarcely begun when her solitude was disturbed. A note had just been brought from the Grove. It was seized with greater agitation than the occasion demanded, for suspense had roused the excitable spirit of the Countess, and illness had caused a feverish eagerness. She tore open the seal, read the few hasty lines, colder far than Margaret's wonted expressions, from the tumult of agitation in which they had been penned, and, casting it from her indignantly, without attempt at reason or extenuation, yielded to the belief that the affection which she had confided was but a phantom of her own creation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The wretchedness of the solitary hours which followed Margaret's confession to Mr. Sutherland cannot be described in words. They alone can fully understand it who have borne the terrible uprooting of the simple faith of their childhood; the loss of that spirit of trust, it may in some cases be credulity, which rests upon those by whom it has been taught; thinks with their thoughts, as it worships in their forms; and casts itself without a care upon the turbulent ocean of life, secure, that whilst clinging to the same plank with them, the waves can never overwhelm it. That trust had, indeed, long since in Margaret's case been shaken; but it had lived in a new form. The Countess and Father Andrea had been her guides instead of Mr. Sutherland. There was still the same reliance upon the judgment of others; and, though Margaret had often endured the misery of doubt, nothing which she had hitherto experienced could be compared to the present trial. Whilst Mr. Sutherland was away, the balance was decidedly in favour of the Countess; and Margaret was willing to trust to her direction, and bow to her opinions, and to those of the confessor. But Mr. Sutherland had returned, and his former influence revived. Margaret could not be in his presence without being sensible of it. So holy, elevated, simple, earnest in all his thoughts and actions, it seemed that she had never done him justice before. But if his belief were true, the belief of Father

Andrea and Beatrice must be erroneous. Margaret knew now by bitter experience the instability of any faith which is founded upon, or even in any great degree supported by reverence for a human guide alone. In the hour of trial it gave way. If both might be the messengers of truth, both might be also the teachers of error; and if so, — they were awful moments which ensued, moments when religion and hope vanished from before her. Earth in its beauty became a scene of dreary nothingness; the sky an impenetrable barrier; the sun a mocking, glittering mystery; and through the dark regions of the future, and the unfathomable abysses of the past, the blinded, helpless, sin-defiled spirit, wandered without light, or guide, or aim, knowing neither whence it had come, nor whither it was bound, whilst shrinking from the thought of annihilation by the imperishable instinct of its nature.

Margaret knelt in the attitude of prayer; but the soul of prayer was dead. Yet there was an Eye of Mercy that watched untiring over an erring child; an Arm of Mercy stretched out to help her in her need; and, when in agony she pressed her hand to her forehead to still the tumult of her brain, and firmly closed her eyelids to shut out the gaudy distracting light of day, the mystery of her own being brought back to her mind the first faint ray of light to illumine the darkness of scepticism. The soul, thirsting for perfection, stamped with the impress of infinity and eternity, was in itself a witness to its divine origin. Degraded it might be; ruined, earth-bound; but that which could, even faintly, and at an immeasurable distance, comprehend the idea of God, must originally have come from God. Man cannot enter into the life of the brute creation; the brute creaiton cannot we believe reach upwards to the spirit of man. The two natures seem to be in themselves

essentially different; but the little child kneeling at its mother's knee looks above into the vast blue sky, and grasps, as it were, the presence of an omnipotent omnipresent Deity, and in its short and simple prayers gives testimony to the truth of revelation, which tells us that "in the image of God created He man." With the knowledge of an Almighty Being came the sense of holiness, mercy, love; the truths of Christianity rushed in an instant upon Margaret's mind; whilst a voice, the memory of well-known words, whispered gently to her heart, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Is such a voice the echo of early association, or the breathing of a ministering angel, or more — the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of God? Margaret felt that it was from heaven, and the cloud of darkness passed away, whilst she prayed long and fervently. Truth she knew must exist, and, if sought for humbly and in faith, would assuredly be found. The two requisites were indispensably connected. Perhaps the defect hitherto, though she did not then perceive it, had been, that humility — the willingness to obey an authority set over her, although it did not entirely accord with her own ideas — had been wanting.

But before Margaret could receive any further advice from her uncle she was compelled to join the family; to walk with Agatha, whose spirits and health were giving way under grief and disappointment; to read to her father; and to listen to her mother's recapitulation of a conversation which had that morning passed between herself and Dr. Percival, as to the possibility of any longer keeping George at college. Margaret did all that was required of her tolerably well. She dared not think of herself again. The horrible scepticism might return at any moment. The one great subject must

be kept until she could see her uncle alone; but there was another which would not be banished, and Margaret thought of the Countess Novera with a sickening miserable fear that the end of their happiness was at hand, and with a vague hope that from some unforeseen circumstance they might meet before the day was over. But as the Countess waited in suspense for Margaret, so Margaret waited in vain for the Countess. Night came at last for both; but to Beatrice it brought the yearnings of a desolate heart for the comfort of human affection; to Margaret the determination, that, before she lay down to rest, her mind should be fully made up as to the course which she was henceforth to adopt. If Mr. Sutherland's arguments were, as she fully imagined they would be, unconvincing, she would openly avow her sentiments, risk the possible consequences, and put herself under the immediate guidance of Father Andrea.

Mr. Sutherland had kept his room during the greater part of the day. He was suffering more than Margaret supposed; for he had received a great shock, and his strength was as yet but imperfectly restored. He saw clearly the imminent danger to which Margaret would be exposed if she once allowed herself to believe that the change of religion was a question of conscience and feeling only. At an advanced stage of conviction, conscience, though perverted, and feeling, become our almost necessary guides, and this stage it was possible that she might have reached. The time for reasoning is before we have approached near enough to the forbidden fruit to look at it and admire. Twelve months before Margaret could, from her own knowledge, have refuted many of the errors of Romanism. Now, she might reason; but the fear was lest reason should have lost its power.

"Are you going to the library?" said Margaret to her uncle, as Mrs. Percival left the room soon after tea.

"I was thinking of it; but would you rather I should stay?"

Margaret was inclined to say "no;" she dreaded, though she longed for, the subject to be renewed.

"I should like to talk to you for a few minutes," she said: "but I will follow you. I must go to my father first."

Mr. Sutherland was tired, and well aware that a few minutes would not be sufficient to undo the work of months; but he could not ask Margaret to delay. The subject was too important and engrossing for them both.

And so once again Margaret found herself at the same hour, in the same place, and with the same person, from whom, comparatively but a short time previous, she had received her first notions of the authority and discipline of the English Church. How all was changed since then! abroad and at home, in the affairs of her family, and in that inner circle of her own existence, where lay the well-spring of her happiness. The same idea was probably in Mr. Sutherland's mind, as he placed a chair for her at the table, and said, "Times are changed since you and I, Margaret, conversed together in this room."

Margaret could not sit down, for she was too much agitated.

"We must discuss this matter calmly, my dear child," said Mr. Sutherland; "it is one which above all others requires feeling to be subdued, and reason to be exerted; and I hope and believe that we have both so made use of our solitude as to have gained the strength we require."

"Prayer is easier for you than for me," replied Margaret.

"You must not think that, Margaret. God has pity upon our infirmities."

"And upon our sins?" replied Margaret, doubtfully.

"And upon our sins, too, if we repent. But you will scarcely think that you have sinned."

"I do not know, — not intentionally, — I hope so at least. Do you think I have?"

"I think that you have erred grievously. What degree of guilt is involved in the error, God only can decide. But tell me, can you say that from the commencement of these unhappy doubts you have taken the right course to satisfy yourself?"

"I meant to do so."

"But you were living under an authority; you were baptized into a certain Church; you had parents and guides set over you: did you consult them?"

"I knew what they would say," replied Margaret.

"No; forgive me, you did not know. In my case, for instance, you could have had no idea."

"I was led on," said Margaret, "from one step to another. I did not know where I was going."

"Yet you must have seen from what you were departing. You must have perceived that you were swerving from your allegiance to the English Church. And religion is not a question in which we can suffer ourselves innocently to be led on without knowing where we are going. Every step in it is a step nearer to, or farther from, that eternal truth on which our salvation depends."

"Then what should I have done?" asked Margaret, meekly; and she sat down on a stool at her uncle's feet, looking impatiently for his answer.

"Your first duty was with your own Church, and your own teachers. It is an universal duty, binding upon every one."

"Heathens, Mahometans, Jews, Christians, every one?" exclaimed Margaret.

"Yes, every one; because the circumstances of our birth are to us, at first sight, the evidences of the will of God. But remember, Margaret, the Heathen would inquire of his teacher, and hear that he had no external revelation; the Mahometan would seek in vain for authentic testimony to the mission of his prophet; the Dissenter would discover that, in throwing off episcopacy and a settled creed, his instructors had followed their own will, and not the law of the primitive Church. In all these instances, the result must be unsatisfactory (I am supposing, of course, the case of an intelligent, cultivated mind making the inquiry); and then the decision would be — 'if the religion which I have been taught has not external proof to support it, I am at liberty to seek the truth elsewhere.'"

"That is hard to understand," said Margaret.

"But it is, in fact, a simple rule. If the claims of another religion are brought before you, do not examine into it at once, but go back and see what are the claims of your own. And, observe, we act upon this constantly. Who is there (taking people in general) that gives himself the trouble of asking the creed of all the different sects which we see springing up? Or how many persons, do you think, know the true history of Mahometanism?"

"Very few, of course."

"Very few, indeed; and there is no occasion to know. We are assured that Christianity is true, and that is sufficient for us. Two religions equally true cannot exist at the same time."

"And what books should I have read? How should I have inquired?

"You should not have begun with reading. It would be beyond you. You are a woman, and very young. Your education has been good, but not learned; and the claims of the English Church can only be thoroughly understood by persons who have studied. Clergymen are the appointed teachers in such cases. Was there no clergyman, Margaret, who would have been willing and anxious to settle your mind?"

He looked at her reproachfully; and Margaret's heart smote her for the mistake, — rather, perhaps, the fault, — which she had committed in the reserve which she had practised.

"Yes, I was wrong there," she said, in a low voice; "but I was afraid, for several reasons."

"And the fear might have taught you your danger. If you had applied to me upon the first doubt, you might have saved us both from misery."

"Misery!" said Margaret.

"Yes, misery. The moment when I thought that you might already have taken the final step, was utter misery. Thank God, it was not lasting."

"But surely, surely," exclaimed Margaret, remembering that the religion which her uncle appeared so much to dread was the religion of Beatrice and Father Andrea, "to change from one Church to another cannot be like an apostasy from Christianity?"

"It involves the possibility of a sin, from which we pray constantly to be delivered; that sin which is numbered with sedition, rebellion, hardness of heart, and the contempt of God's commandments, — the sin of schism."

"I did not think so," replied Margaret.

Mr. Sutherland looked at her gravely, and said, — Oh, Margaret! ought you not to have thought so? Is the man who steals guiltless, because he did not think, or, more truly, did not remember that stealing is forbidden?"

"Romanism is Christianity," replied Margaret. "Yes," she added, her eye kindling with animation, "a holy, pure, elevated Christianity."

Mr. Sutherland stopped her: "Nay, Margaret; I can listen to no such praise. The persons whom you have known may be holy, pure, and elevated; but not their creed, for it is not in accordance with the Bible. This you must have seen at the beginning; and it ought to have alarmed you."

"It did," replied Margaret; "but after conversing with the Countess or Father Andrea, the difficulties became less."

There was a slight expression of impatience in Mr. Sutherland's tone as he answered, —

"And so it may really have been. The popular prejudices against Romanism are often exaggerated and unfounded; yet the two Churches must ever remain distinct. No man can hold the doctrines of the Church of Rome and the doctrines of the Church of England together."

"Father Andrea would tell me that," replied Margaret.

"And he is right, quite right; there can be no compromise. The question is, which are the true doctrines?"

"There has seemed but little doubt when I have conversed with Father Andrea," said Margaret, in faltering accents.

"I am not going to combat the confessor's arguments," observed Mr. Sutherland; "and I have no wish to hear them."

Margaret looked at him in great surprise.

"They are nothing to me," he continued; "at least, as far as you are concerned. It would be a waste of words to disprove each separate error of Romanism."

"Then there is no hope," said Margaret, with a little tone of asperity; but the hasty feeling was only momentary; and she added, immediately, "You cannot mean to be unkind?"

"Not for the world. It would be most cruel to add one instant of sorrow to those which you have to bear; but until we have destroyed the main spring of error, there is little gained by attacking the minor evils."

"I cannot comprehend you," replied Margaret, impatiently; "Father Andrea's language is clear and very different."

"It shall not be clearer in the end," answered Mr. Sutherland, with perfect gentleness; "but, I fear, you are not prepared for cool reasoning, and yet I cannot, and will not, use any other mode of convincing you that you are wrong."

"I am prepared for any thing which shall give me rest," said Margaret.

Mr. Sutherland regarded her with the deepest compassion. The face, once full of animation and cheerfulness, was now marked by traces of long and wearying thought.

"Give me, then, your full attention, my dear Margaret," he said, "as to a question involving interests far beyond this world. I have prayed that I may be able to set it clearly before you, and I have a full trust that my prayer will be granted."

Margaret's eager manner was subdued, but she did not ask him to go on.

"You probably expect," continued Mr. Sutherland, "that I am going to bring forward the common arguments against the worship of the Virgin,

the doctrines of indulgences, purgatory, the invocation of saints, and others like them; and I might do so easily: but the result would be, that the next time you met Father Andrea, or any other clever Romanist, he might do away with all I had said in two ways; either he might modify, and palliate, and draw nice distinctions, so as entirely to mystify you as to the real doctrines of the Romish Church; or he might say that the Romish Church is the only true Church, therefore infallible, — therefore not to be disputed in any thing which she may decree concerning matters of faith."

"Father Andrea does say this," replied Margaret; "he declares that we have cut ourselves off from the true Church; that we are governed by acts of parliament; that our sacraments are invalid, and our doctrines heretical; and he points to the working of our Church as a proof of its inefficiency."

"Exactly what I expected to hear," replied Mr. Sutherland; "and, observe, if these statements are proved to be false, the question as to the other points upon which Rome condemns us cannot concern you. As a baptized member of the English Church, you are bound to abide in her communion."

"I would rather Father Andrea were here to answer you, than for me to attempt it," said Margaret.

"You will find nothing beyond your comprehension," replied her uncle. "Let me ask you a few questions. You say that the English Church is an act of parliament Church. How can that be, when its very essence consists in an apostolic ministry, a succession derived from the primitive Church?"

"But the state does interfere very much," said Margaret.

"Yes, very much; so much as to make one

tremble for the existence of the Church, as the national religion. But can an act of parliament make void episcopal ordination?"

"No; yet it may prevent a bishop from exercising his functions."

"Assuredly it may. You may bind a man's hands, and laugh at him for his helplessness, but that does not destroy the hands themselves. The problem is clearly solved in the case of the Scotch Church. An act of parliament annihilated it, as far as could be done; but the Scotch Church lives, and flourishes, and must continue to do so. Such would be the case also with the English Church, if the State were to disown her."

"But if we are not in communion with the true Church all this is nothing," said Margaret.

"Granted entirely — if we are not; but here you enter upon a totally different subject. What is it constitutes a true Church?"

"Father Andrea would say that no Church can be a true Church which does not submit to the visible head, the universal bishop," answered Margaret.

"Yes, he must say so. But who constituted the Bishop of Rome the universal bishop?"

"He was always acknowledged to be so until the Reformation."

Mr. Sutherland half smiled. "It is a curious fact," he said, "that the ancient British Church should have been quite independent of Rome, and that the whole of the Eastern Church should from the very earliest ages have set aside the claim. But, Margaret, Father Andrea says one thing, and I say another: which do you intend to believe?"

"Father Andrea has the Church for fifteen centuries with him," replied Margaret.

"That, begging your pardon, I utterly deny.

Father Andrea has the early Church entirely against him."

"How can this be proved?"

"Rather, how can you prove that it is not so? For a member of the English Church,—the burden of proof lies on the side of Rome."

"We are reasoning at a disadvantage," said Margaret, looking extremely unhappy. "I have no learning to confute you, but Father Andrea has."

"Still that cannot help you. His learning may be of use to him; but when we both stand before you, mine must have an equal weight. You cannot leave the Church of your fathers because you choose to believe Father Andrea rather than me. Margaret, what are you to do?"

Margaret was evidently perplexed. "If I were not so ignorant," she began—"but Father Andrea has no doubt, and supports his belief by constant appeals to the early writers."

"All which have been again and again disproved by the divines of the English Church. And for confidence, as truly as I believe that there is a God in heaven, so truly do I believe that the English Church is a true branch of the Catholic Church."

Margaret was much struck by the solemnity of the assertion, but she was unwilling to acknowledge it.

"Listen to me, Margaret," continued Mr. Sutherland, earnestly. "An act of parliament Church the English Church cannot be, because she has the gift of the apostolical succession. Heretical she cannot be, because she holds the creed of the apostles, and the canons of the first four general councils. Schismatical she cannot be, unless the claim of the Bishop of Rome to be the universal bishop is proved to be valid. Now, before you can attempt to form an opinion for yourself upon this point, I will tell

you the learning which is absolutely required. First, an acquaintance with the works of the great English divines — Taylor, Andrews, Hooker, Hammond, Bull, Beveridge, and very many besides. Next, a comparison of their statements with those of Bellarmine, Baronius, and the chief Romanist writers. Then a perfect knowledge of ecclesiastical history, without which you cannot decide as to the credibility of the facts brought forward. And lastly, a long and deep study of the early fathers, implying, of course, critical learning in the Greek and Latin languages."

Margaret mused for a few moments, and then said, "I do not see how this can be. The question of the papal supremacy cannot be so very intricate."

"It would not be intricate if you were wishing merely to confirm your faith in the English Church. I would then put a few plain facts before you, which must at once be conclusive. But if you mean to decide for yourself, you are bound in justice to both Churches to provide yourself with the requisite amount of learning."

"And are you sure that the papal supremacy is the only point to be considered?"

"It cannot be otherwise where a Church possesses the apostolical succession, and holds to the creed of the apostles, and the canons of the first four general councils. Nothing but the doctrine of the Papal Supremacy can invalidate our orders, or sanction our excommunication, or oblige us to accept the creed of Pope Pius as well as that of the apostles."

"But," replied Margaret, "you have said nothing of the inefficiency of the English Church, its neglect of discipline, and its internal divisions, and its want of provision for the poor."

"The American Church, Margaret, is in some

respects a more effective Church than ours. She has lately made great missionary exertions. Suppose an American bishop were to settle himself in England, and claim your allegiance for that reason, what should you say?"

"You do not deny the accusation, though," said Margaret, evading a reply.

"If I do not, it is because I feel its truth in my own breast, and would humble myself daily and hourly before God, for the share which I have had in bringing the Church of my country, the holy, pure, apostolic Church of England into disesteem."

Margaret was not prepared with an immediate objection to this answer; but at length, with an air of the deepest mental distress, she said, "This may all be true; I can bring nothing at the present moment against it; but it gives me no certainty. Such reasoning would, if I were born a Romanist, keep me one."

"As far as we have yet gone, my love, undoubtedly it would. Your ignorance would be as conclusive against a change of religion in the one case as the other."

"Then it must be dark, all dark, even to the end," said Margaret, in a voice of despair. "I can never know from my own persuasion that the doctrines of Rome are indeed false."

"No, Margaret: far from it. God has given 'a lantern unto your feet, and a light unto your path.' He has put the Bible into your hands, and when you wish for a confirmation of the truth of your Church you have but to open it and read."

"And we are then at last thrown back upon our own judgment!" exclaimed Margaret; "so that truth is, as Dissenters would say, that which every one can discover for himself from the Bible."

"Stay, Margaret, that is a hasty decision. I, as

a clergyman of the English branch of the Catholic Church, come before you with a statement of her doctrines. As a proof that these doctrines are true, I confirm them by the inspired Word of God. A Dissenter comes to you without authority; he puts the Bible into your hands, and says, 'Discover its doctrines for yourself.' A Romanist says, 'You are very ignorant, and you must believe what I tell you: if my doctrines accord with the Bible, well and good; if not, still you must believe, because the Romish Church asserts that it is so.' The three cases are totally distinct, and if the doctrines of the English Church could not be proved by the Bible we should be bound to seek for that faith which could be."

Margaret rested her head upon her hand, and was lost in thought. Mr. Sutherland did not interrupt her; but a prayer that she might be directed in this her hour of need arose from his inmost heart, as he saw reason to hope that the mists which had clouded her judgment might eventually be dispersed.

"And the Romanist in a foreign country must then either give up the Church or the Bible?" said Margaret, again renewing the conversation.

"That is a question upon which I cannot now enter," replied her uncle. "It is one which does not in the slightest degree alter your duty. Cast aside every consideration but that which immediately concerns yourself, for there is no safety for you else."

Mr. Sutherland spoke solemnly, and Margaret could not conceal her agitation. "It is late," she said, rising suddenly: "we have been talking a long time."

Mr. Sutherland was not satisfied with her manner, and, retaining her hand, said, "We cannot part in this way, Margaret."

"If Father Andrea were but with us! if you could hear him!" she exclaimed.

"Father Andrea is but a human being. Let him be good and learned as he may, he has no power over truth. Margaret, are you in any way more satisfied?"

"I do not know, — I must think," replied Margaret, greatly distressed.

"But, my dear child, answer me this one question. If you think, and afterwards decide contrary to my advice, upon whose judgment must you act?"

"Upon my own, undoubtedly."

"And yet you acknowledge that you have not the means of forming a correct judgment; whom then will you consult — Father Andrea?"

Margaret could not answer "No."

"Will not that be wilfulness, Margaret?" said Mr. Sutherland, sternly. He had never spoken so before, and she trembled. "Wilfulness," he continued, "which cannot be guiltless in the sight of God."

"In pity, do not speak so harshly to me," exclaimed Margaret, overcome by a sudden sense of desertion.

Mr. Sutherland's manner softened instantly; but his voice was still most solemn as he said, "My own Margaret, if God would vouchsafe to open your eyes, to show you your snare, the peril of your soul's salvation!"

"God will have mercy upon a weak conscience," said Margaret, faintly.

"God will have mercy upon a conscience which has never been warned; but when the warning has been given, our guilt must be upon our own heads. If my words have now carried conviction with them, the course you must adopt is clear. Romanism, under whatever form it tempts you, books, or

friends, even things which seem in themselves holy and pure, must be given up."

"I would hear the arguments again," said Margaret, forcibly repelling the idea of the sacrifice which the words implied.

"You can scarcely require that. You have but to remember that the English Church claims to be the true Church; that her claims can only be set aside by admitting the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome; that the fact of this supremacy is utterly beyond your own investigation, and has been again and again refuted by English divines; and that to adopt the opinion of Father Andrea or any other person against theirs is a wilful turning aside from the guides whom God has appointed you to follow. And above all, Margaret, read your Bible, and pray with your Prayer-book, and keep a careful watch over a criticising, discontented spirit, and you will never become a Romanist."

Mr. Sutherland stopped, hoping that Margaret would say something which might show that his words were not thrown away. There seemed still, however, to be difficulties rankling in her mind, and her reply was, "Doubts will come continually."

"Most certainly they will; but I will give you two rules for dealing with them. At the moment they arise do not attempt to argue against them. Crush them as you would a sceptical or infidel doubt."

"And how?"

"By making, what I might almost call, a physical effort against them. Let your first help be prayer, very short; it can scarcely be too short, if it is earnest. Afterwards, repeat verses, walk about, read, sing, do any thing which shall be actual occupation for the moment. Every one knows what an incipient thought is; in that stage it may be kept

down with comparatively little effort. Then, do not trouble yourself at any time with more arguments than are necessary. Your own ignorance, the duty of remaining where God has placed you, unless you have absolute demonstration, which you never can have, that the English Church is no true Church; and the entire accordance of the Bible and the Prayer-book will be sufficient. Try these in any way you please: they cannot be controverted; and until they are controverted Romanism can be nothing to you."

"I shall seem to be resisting truth," said Margaret.

"Yes, there will be your great difficulty. Sceptical thoughts we know at once to be wrong; these, on the contrary, will assume the guise of truth; but it will be sufficient for you to remember that you would do no good by entertaining them at that exact moment. When doubts are suggested in a sudden way, the mind is incapable of reasoning upon them. Rid yourself of them for the time being, and in a different mood you will see clearly that they were temptations."

Margaret thought of Beatrice, and scarcely wished that her uncle's words should be true. Mr. Sutherland guessed what was passing in her mind. He saw that during the whole of the conversation Margaret had not entered heartily into the subject. She had given an assent, but an unwilling one. "My reasoning has been cold," he said; "it has not suited you. Are you sure, Margaret, that your feelings are not more interested than your conscience?"

Margaret tried to answer with composure, but she dreaded what might be coming. "I will try to act upon what you have said," she replied; "at least for a time."

"My dear Margaret, there must be no trusting to the future in this case. Your actions must be present."

"I will return my books. I will read the Bible more, and pray more, and I will endeavour to be contented."

"And, Margaret"—Mr. Sutherland could with difficulty utter the words—"you will give up the Countess Novera?"

Margaret's look of utter wretchedness brought anguish to her uncle's heart. At the moment when he was inflicting so much pain his love was increasing with his compassion. "It cannot be necessary," she said, averting her face, and speaking in a broken voice. "Let me have time to consider."

"Consider, Margaret, and be lost. Consider, and make excuses; see the Countess once more, listen to her enticing words, and Father Andrea's specious arguments, and give yourself up to them for ever."

"Then you are afraid?" said Margaret.

"Yes, afraid of your weakness, though confident I trust even to death, were it required of me, in the truth of the English Church."

"But if I am furnished with sound arguments?" continued Margaret.

"They will not be a safeguard against the temptations of feeling. Margaret, there is no alternative; once again place yourself within reach of the snare, and you will have no right to reckon upon the aid of the Spirit of God to save you."

"Life, a long life without her!" repeated Margaret, to herself.

"And eternity! Oh, Margaret, do not deceive yourself. Ignorance and innocence are no longer in your power. You have been warned."

"I will but repeat what you have said," replied

Margaret, "I will own that I may have erred, and that it is safest we should part; and she will love me still, and the memory of her love will be the blessing of the dark years that are before me."

"You are deluding yourself," replied Mr. Sutherland. "You are reckoning upon a strength which is not yours. The Countess Novera and yourself must never meet again."

"Never! impossible! You do not know what you require."

"But I do know all that is at stake. Even if you should come forth unhurt from the trial, the very act itself would be sinful, for it would be a wilful rushing into temptation."

"I cannot bear this longer. I must be alone," exclaimed Margaret, as she moved slowly to the door, whilst her face became pale as if she would have fainted. Mr. Sutherland put out his hand to support her, and said sadly, "Margaret, will you forgive me?"

There was no answer. Mr. Sutherland dreaded even then that his efforts would be ineffectual; but as they stood together in the lobby, Margaret's assumed coldness gave way. "Pray for me," she said, bursting into tears, "and love me—I am very miserable."

"Love you through all, beyond all: One only excepted. Margaret, He has said, 'He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.'"

CHAPTER XXV.

THERE was little sleep for Margaret on that night; her mind could not rest in indecision. The friendship of the Countess must be either yielded or retained, and the question must be resolved immediately. The conversation which had just passed had failed in convincing her that the Countess was in error, but it had opened her eyes to the possibility of presumption in continuing the intimacy. If, as Mr. Sutherland asserted, the English Church were undeniably, indisputably true, and that it was not she could not herself at that moment declare, it was, doubtless, incurring a sinful risk to place herself within reach of the temptation to leave it. For Margaret was aware, now, that the friendship of the Countess was a temptation. It had shed a charm of romance over her life for the last two years; had contributed daily to her happiness; and had even at times come between herself and her home duties. Mr. Sutherland would have said that it had made her wilfully neglect the authority of the Church, and Margaret could not have repelled the accusation. Yet suddenly to take the final step of separation seemed impossible. Young and inexperienced, and full of warm affections, Margaret thought, that if Beatrice were taken away, the rest of her life would be dreary and hopeless. It seemed, then, as if no other friendship could supply the place of hers. And this was in a measure true. That peculiar feeling with which, from

congeniality of taste, or even from accidental circumstances, we regard the individuals whom we love, is theirs and theirs alone. From the unconscious child, whose laugh is music to our ears, to the parent, the husband, the brother, the wife, or the friend, who can share our every thought, there is for each a home in our hearts, which when vacant can never be filled again. We bear their images stamped upon our memories, to fade away indeed as the mists of time gather over the scenes of the past, but never to be effaced until we sink ourselves into the grave, covered with the scars of the wounds which separation and death have caused. Margaret could never restore the happiness which she had enjoyed with the Countess if it were once destroyed; but she might learn to be contented without it, though at that moment she could not believe it. She could even have said, that to bid her attempt it was cruelty, if her uncle's last words had not reminded her that the sacrifice might be demanded by a higher authority. Doubts followed, such as she herself had anticipated; the fear, lest after all she should be choosing darkness rather than light. Mr. Sutherland's arguments seemed unconvincing; and in utter bewilderment, Margaret said that she would think no more; she would wait till sleep had restored her faculties.

Sleep came, full of wild dreams, and broken by sudden startings. In a few minutes a whole night had apparently gone by, so crowded were they with harassing scenes which left nothing but fears behind them. Towards the morning she fell into a deeper repose, yet scarcely a happier one; for once again, though dim and changing, came the dream of the unhappy Rachel de Lisle, which had before so deeply impressed her mind. Yet her feelings were

not what they then had been. She stood indeed amongst the stranger crowd before the image of the Virgin; but Mr. Sutherland's warning countenance had taken the place of Father Andrea's commanding expression; and a spirit within her own breast bade her resist even unto death. All which followed was confused; but when Margaret awoke, it was with a sense of greater strength than when she lay down to rest. She sat up in bed; her brow aching, her lips feverish, and suffering from that indescribable sinking of the heart, which is the foretaste of a coming sorrow.

But a few short hours, and the Countess would be gone; and it might be well, — the separation might take place more gently in consequence. The idea was entertained for a few moments only. Margaret possessed too much energy to submit to passive endurance. She felt that some step must be taken, if it were merely to give rest to her own mind, and she set herself resolutely to think.

Every difficulty resolved itself into this one question. Could she venture to act against her uncle's advice? He required her to sacrifice a friendship which was most precious to her, because it might lead her into what he thought evil. Margaret did not see the evil, at least in the same light. To her it was doubtful only. But in questions of religion a doubt is of great weight. Romanism might be wrong — it might be schism — she might be led to embrace it — there seemed the reason for immediately turning from all that might tempt her to it. Yet again, it might be right; she might be forsaking the truth. How could she decide? Mr. Sutherland had not convinced her. He appeared, indeed, scarcely inclined to attempt doing so. Was he justified in insisting upon her giving up the Countess until she was convinced? Conscience an-

swered that, to reason clearly and impartially, our affections must be unbiassed. Still he had no absolute authority to command her. He was neither her father, nor the clergyman of her parish; but from the circumstances of her position, he appeared to have been provided as her guide. He was her nearest relation, an ordained priest of the English Church, who had been the means of first awakening her to a sense of her religious duties. In the letter he might not have authority over her; in the spirit he certainly had. Margaret's sincerity was opening a way through the darkness; but it still seemed that no command could be justifiably obeyed which involved an entire surrender of her own judgment, and an abandonment of the inquiry into subjects of such infinite importance. Yet to break off the acquaintance with the Countess did not necessarily involve this. It was but the removal of a stumblingblock. Truth might still be sought under safer guidance. The conclusion seemed inevitable; but the prospect was one she could not face. Possibly some middle way might be discovered, and Margaret's indecision increased with the hope. She tried to recall all that her uncle had said — the arguments he had used, and to combat them by principles and ideas which she had gained from Father Andrea. Reasoning grew more and more difficult; feeling more and more imperative. She pictured the Countess's suffering, and her own desolation, and the future seemed a dreary waste. Peace! where was it to be found? and if religion could not give it, life must be intolerable! Margaret's reliance upon her own judgment was fast dying away, for she was wearied with contradictory feelings, when suddenly, with an overwhelming, horrible power, the scepticism, the awful doubt of all truth rushed again upon her mind. Her brain reeled.

With a desperate effort she paused. For a few seconds all was a blank before her; but when the tide of thought seemed returning to its former channel, she had strength given her to arrest it. Reasoning she felt was hopeless. To act seemed her only safety, and she placed a sheet of paper upon her desk. Should it contain an excuse for her absence on the previous day which might leave an opening for a further communication, or should it be a settled farewell? Margaret wrote the first words, and laid down the pen. She might be able so to express herself as to satisfy the Countess for the time, and leave herself more leisure for consideration; and although this was not quite in accordance with Mr. Sutherland's wishes, and did not entirely ease her own conscience, it was all which she could determine upon doing; and it was at least a definite act, better than arguing. The note was finished, and Margaret proceeded to dress. But still she dwelt upon the same subject. She began to conjecture what effect the note would have upon the Countess. The last interview had been unsatisfactory, because Margaret had been reserved. Then it was not likely that Beatrice would be contented with learning merely that unforeseen circumstances had prevented the engagement from being kept. She would be vexed and irritated, or, what was even more likely, from the eagerness and excitability of her disposition, she would come at once to the Grove. They would meet. Mr. Sutherland had said the meeting would be sinful, whatever might be its result. He had no doubt as to the right course. And to risk a sin! Margaret's strength of character was not of this world, and she trembled at the idea. While still harassed by these perplexities, she knelt to her morning prayers, and asked to be kept from the path of temptation. If she were to see Beatrice,

would it not be a temptation? Could she answer for herself? And after Mr. Sutherland's express advice, would it not be wrong to delay? Could delay in the least alter the duty? The prayer was stopped, for Margaret could not be double-minded. At the same instant Mr. Sutherland's voice was heard in the passage. She knew what he would expect. In explaining all to the Countess at once, there was humility, and it might be safety. In procrastination there was the spirit of self-will. It was but a dim light which was granted; but Margaret had power enough to see that she was called upon to follow it. The note was destroyed, and she sat down again, with the blank paper on her desk. Still there was the thought of delay, the wish to qualify. She pressed her hands upon her swollen eyelids, scorched with tears, and heavy with weariness, and the pulsation of her heart grew faint, and the aching of her forehead became intense pain. The sound of footsteps and laughter reached her. Grace and Philip were going into the garden to play. Oh! for one moment of childhood's freedom from care, one instant's taste of the happiness which knows no alloy!

Margaret pushed aside the paper, and walked the room quickly. Time was passing on; the day's duties were before her. Suspense was goading her to desperation, and at length, urged by conscience and sincerity to the act, though still scarcely under the influence of reason, she wrote a final farewell.

"You must have wondered at my hasty lines yesterday: you will wonder still more to-day. My thoughts have been with you through the night, and now I must write at once, or my courage may fail. The last two days have brought grief and bewilderment to my mind. Beatrice, I am told that I have been fearfully misled. I do not venture

to say so myself, for my mind is a chaos; I can judge of nothing. You will know that my uncle is returned, and perhaps the knowledge may have given you some clue to my distress. I would willingly have kept from him the secret of my wavering faith until I was strengthened by Father Andrea's arguments, but he has drawn the truth from me. How, when I look back, I can scarcely tell. Perhaps it was my own weakness, my sin. Oh, Beatrice, may you never have to endure what I am now enduring, a distrust of the path of duty! My uncle tells me I have been in grievous error. He says that I am ignorant and wilful. He is good, and wise, and self-denying—Father Andrea himself cannot surpass him—and his faith in the English Church is built on a foundation which it seems that nothing can shake; nothing, at least, that I can say, for I know nothing. I must trust either to him or to Father Andrea. There is a horrible conflict in my mind; it has even verged upon madness. When I think of you, I could follow you blindly and unhesitatingly. When I listen to him, I shrink back as from the brink of a precipice. Have pity upon me as you read, and spare me when you would condemn my irresolution. For, Beatrice, I am not irresolute. I have brought myself to an unalterable determination — the God who sees my heart knows at what a price of suffering. Your love has been a snare, and it must be relinquished. Truth is now hidden from me; I must seek for it calmly and impartially. Whilst with you that can never be, and we must part. As I write the words, your image is before me, and my brain is dizzy with wretchedness. Beatrice, how I have loved you!—not as you have loved me, with a sense of protection and compassion, but with the humble, trusting, reverential, absorbing love which is due to one so far above

me in all things. And how I must love you still! —now,—henceforth,—for ever,—beyond the darkness of the grave;—that is my hope, my only hope. There is a world where truth is clear as the noonday; and in that world we shall meet once more. Even now I dare not say that you are wrong. I cannot bring my mind to think it; but I know that your affection misleads my judgment; that it shakes my faith in the Church in which I was baptized. I know that whilst our intercourse remains such as it has been, the line of duty will never be made clear; and therefore I have said that we must part. Yes, it is happier for us both, and you will feel that it is so. Restraint, after the happiness we have known, would be worse than separation; and even if it were not so, I am told that I must not risk it. Yet, I cannot think that I am writing to you for the last time; that I must never see you again, except as a stranger. All the remembrances of the past are rising before me: our first meeting abroad; that time when I knew neither the blessing nor the anguish which your love might cause; and the hallowed associations of St. Ouen; and then our personal knowledge, and the delight of our passing interviews; and my strangely sad, yet happy visit. Rhoda said that I should be safe; she knows now how best her words may be fulfilled.

"One fear I have—but I strive to cast it from me —that you will judge me hardly. You say that the spirit of the proud Viscountess is yours, and it may be that you will think of me as of her unhappy daughter; but, Beatrice, you will do me a grievous injustice. If weakness had power to lead me astray, it would be the weakness of my love for you. I am acting indeed under guidance; but if you knew the state of my mind, you would be the last to bid me trust to myself. I could write on for hours; for

whilst I am writing, I am with you; when my letter is closed, we are parted. Think of me, and when you think, pray. God will listen to your prayers, and give us that which is most needful for us both. And, Beatrice, you will hear of me; there is no reason that you should not. I shall never hear of you; I could not bear it. My walks, and books, and pursuits, must all be changed. I must enter upon another life. Perhaps it is in mercy that the trials of my home are so ordered as to force me to active exertion; possibly in scenes distant from these. The future lies dark before me. Once I thought that it could never be so while you were living; but God has chastened His sinful child, and I would seek to be submissive to His will. I dare not think what you will feel or say when you read this. My heart becomes rebellious, and would fain seek a means of escape. You will be sorrowful, dearest Beatrice, for you have loved me truly; but you can never feel what I feel, for you never can have reverenced as I have done. Perhaps England will be sad to you without me, and you will return to Italy; perhaps you will leave Henningsley. I must try not to think; but my resolution cannot be shaken. I must neither see nor hear from you. Say to Father Andrea (I do not venture to write to him) that my deepest gratitude must ever be his, for the effort he has made in my behalf. A doubt comes over me that in leaving him I am leaving the way of truth. He will grieve over me, and tell me that it is so; but I have no power to decide. Inquiry must come at a future period. If my life should be spared, and the calmness of my mind restored, I have faith that a light will be granted to my ignorance. Now I can but yield to the guide whom God has given me, and trust that all will be well. Is this cold and ungrateful?—do not let it seem so,

You, who know me best, can assure him of my reverence and thanks. One comfort I shall have in prayer for you both. When we parted last, you complained that I would have kept back from you my confidence; that thought weighs heavily upon my mind. Will you not believe now that you should know all, to the very utmost you might desire? — but I am selfish, and can think only of my own wretchedness. There is another fear which oppresses me — for your health; it will follow me always. I think I could bear to hear that you were in Italy; but I must not hear, — at least, not at present — not from yourself. It would be cruelty to continue to write to me, for I could not dare to answer you. The sun shines so brightly! but a few days since it would have been the prophecy of happiness with you. Now,— God grant that the sun may shine upon you wherever your home may be, — the sun of His presence and His love! Dearest Beatrice, ask this blessing for me, and I will ask it for you. And may our eyes at length be opened to a knowledge of His truth!

"Yours (in the fullest sense of the words),

"For ever,

"MARGARET PERCIVAL."

And Margaret laid her head upon the table, and wept most bitterly.

The Countess Novera arose at an unusually early hour, to prepare for the journey which was before her. She was calm in manner, for Lucia was near; and the disappointment which was in her heart, she would not for worlds have betrayed. They breakfasted together, almost in silence. The Countess ate nothing; but would not allow that she was more unwell than usual. Lucia proposed that she should rest until the carriage was actually at the

door, and the Countess agreed; yet she would not remain in the drawing-room, for Lucia's presence was a burden. Some messages and notes were brought during the breakfast, and at each entrance of the servant the Countess turned round quickly; then, as she encountered Lucia's eye, her manner became composed, and her heart grew sterner, for she said to herself that Margaret had deceived her; that she had professed a love which she did not feel, and that apologies could only serve to make the truth more evident. They were to leave Henningsley at eleven. Lucia was ready before, and walking on the terrace. It could scarcely be said that she was happier than she had lately been, for she was indulging an evil passion, the satisfaction of a triumphant jealousy; but she did believe that it might be possible now to regain her lost place in the Countess's affections. As she looked over the park, a man was seen approaching from the lodge. He drew nearer, and Lucia perceived Dr. Percival's livery. There was a message, then — perhaps an explanation — perhaps an entreaty that Margaret might see the Countess before she went. In an instant the jealous fit had returned in full force. Lucia opened the shrubbery gate and went into the park. The man touched his hat, and would have passed on to the house, but she stopped him. "Had he any note?"

"Yes, one from the Grove; he had been charged not to delay it."

"Then give it me, I will take it;" and Lucia held out her hand.

The writing was Margaret's! it was more than a note, apparently a letter. What could be the contents? The servant turned homewards, and Lucia stood to rest under the trees. What would she not have given to read the contents of the packet? She fancied they would be decisive of her own fate, and

why should she not? Delicacy—honour—forbade it; but jealousy is stronger than honour; the Bible says that there are cases in which it is "cruel as the grave." It was the impulse of a moment; yet not so—it was the crowning act of months of cherished sin. Lucia loosened the seal, even in her agitation carefully, that the letter might be firmly re-sealed again. The handwriting was trembling, and the pages were blotted with tears. She read on, hurriedly—nervously—scarcely at first taking in the sense of the expressions; but the fact was realised by degrees. The object of her wishes was attained. The Countess and Margaret would be separated. Yet Lucia perused the lines once more. The case seemed less certain. Beatrice was not likely to submit to such a parting: Margaret's unhappiness would touch her to the heart; she would insist upon seeing her; she would urge her to retreat; the journey to London would be postponed; Father Andrea's aid would be called in; and Margaret would be bound for ever to the Romish Church, and, as a consequence, to the Countess Novera. There was a safer, a surer way. As the case stood now, Margaret would never write again. The Countess was angry, her notes of expostulation would be cold, and they would be unanswered. Lucia was too impetuous to calculate upon all the probable events which, even if this letter were never seen, might sooner or later produce an explanation. Her only desire was to gain time, to prevent the Countess from remaining a day longer at Henningsley, or making an effort to see Margaret. The temptation presented itself, and it was followed. Lucia had suffered herself too long to be the victim of her passion to struggle against it. The letter was torn into a hundred pieces, and scattered to the winds. A pang of shame and horror ensued; but it was

conquered. Lucia said to herself that she had made the case neither better nor worse than it was before: Margaret had declared that they must not meet, and they would not. She appeared before the Countess still and reserved, as was her wont: but there was a crimson spot burning on her cheek, and her voice was tremulous; and when, an hour afterwards, the carriage drove past the gates of the Grove, and Beatrice, leaning far back, covered her face to hide the tears which streamed down her pale cheeks —Lucia's conscience felt so terrible a reproach, that to have had the letter once more in her possession, she would thankfully have heard that Margaret Percival was to be the Countess's friend and companion for ever.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Four weeks of the bright early summer had passed away, and all things were blest and joyous. So at least it seemed to such as could watch the beauty of the external world without marring its loveliness by the associations which sin and suffering have caused. The Church, following her yearly course of holy days and fasts, had again reached the festival of St. Barnabas, and, in many a Christian temple and from many a Christian heart fervent prayers, and hallowed thoughts, were rising to heaven, in gratitude for the manifold gifts which the Almighty has, in all ages, bestowed upon His people, and entreaties for grace, that they might be used continually to His glory. And is there any grace or any gift higher or purer than the gift of cheerful resignation? Not the cold stoicism of the heathen, which bids us endure because we cannot escape; neither the self-sufficient pride of the sceptic, which, looking upon sickness and sorrow as unmixed evil, would call upon us to pass through the trials of life like men struggling with a deadly enemy, whom to conquer is to be glorious; but the meek, heartfelt, loving resignation, of the spirit, obedient to a Father's will, conscious of infirmity, thankful for chastening, and even while yet prosperous and happy, owning that they are blest to whom it has been granted to be partakers of their Saviour's suffering, and bear the burden of that cross which He left as a precious legacy to His true disciples.

Margaret Percival had full need of all the resignation which the teaching of the Word of God, and the holy examples of His saints could impart. Her home was desolate, her mother a widow. She herself crushed by disappointed affection, and suffering from the pressure of the first overpowering affliction of her family, and the physical weakness consequent upon days and nights of watching by her father's dying bed. Yet even in that hour of trial Margaret could be thankful. She could turn from her own secret grief — the question which would frequently arise, whether she had acted kindly and wisely — the anguish of suspense, with which day after day she waited for a letter from the Countess, whilst no letter came; she could trust herself to look upon the future, and to recall the last sorrowful scenes of her father's life: she could even sustain the occasional torture of reviving doubts (for although they were kept under by Mr. Sutherland's assistance, they could not suddenly be removed), because she had followed the clear line of duty, and had walked by the faint light which was afforded her, without seeking to delay, in the vain expectation that the noonday would in a moment follow upon midnight.

Dr. Percival's illness had at the last increased most rapidly. Within a fortnight of his death Margaret had still retained a lingering hope; but he himself had none. The breaking up of a constitution which, for years, had been tried by great mental and physical fatigue, was not a complaint from which it was probable he should recover; and he watched his own symptoms with an eye quickened by experience, and rendered suspicious by uneasiness of mind arising from the unsettled state in which his affairs must be left, and the difficulties which would in consequence surround his wife and

children. Margaret had a more than ordinary trial to go through, when it was declared certain, according to all human knowledge, that her father could not live. Mrs. Percival's energy broke down at the announcement: she was overpowered by the presence not only of grief, but of perplexing worldly business. Her husband would willingly have given her directions for the future, but she could not listen to him. It was Margaret, who was to be present during the lawyer's visits; Margaret, who was to hear of debts and insurances; Margaret, who was to receive advice as to what it would be most desirable for the family to do in the event of Dr. Percival's death. Yet there was mercy in the affliction, a peculiar mercy to Margaret. Her thoughts were withdrawn from herself, and in the midst of her distress there were moments of inexpressible comfort; as she saw reason to believe that suffering had wrought its hallowed work upon her father's mind. The ordeal at last was, however, very severe. Responsibility and exertion were in a measure taken from herself, for Mr. Sutherland came, and Craven and George; and she was left more to her own reflections. From the wish to help her they gave her too much rest. Mr. Sutherland saw her looking ill, and often sent her to her room to sleep; but Margaret could not sleep. She could forget for a few minutes; but then the reality would come back with increasing bitterness. And in the darkness and loneliness of night, bright memories of the past returned to mock her. She thought of Beatrice, repeated her own sad letter, and dwelt upon each separate expression, hoping to discover what could have been the offence which had so warped the Countess's true and generous spirit as to induce her to depart without one answering word of kindness; whilst, as examination failed

to throw light upon the mystery, the tears of disappointment flowed afresh, and when Margaret again slept, it was but to renew her grief in dreams.

And now the worst trial of the family was over. Pain could never again be felt; helplessness could never be a burden; the lingering agony of a parting hour could no more break down the fortitude of the man whose life had been spent in scenes of suffering, whose years had been numbered by the death-beds which he had attended. In the consciousness of the near approach of his last moments, Dr. Percival called around his bed those whom he best loved; he renewed Craven's earnest confession of repentance, and granted him his full forgiveness. He bade farewell to all, and withdrawing his thoughts from earth, rested them upon the Saviour before whom he was about to appear. The last rays of life flickered for a few still awful moments, and then they were extinguished in death; and on the festival of St. Barnabas Dr. Percival was borne to his grave, and his wife and children were left in their desolate home, to decide upon the steps which must be taken for the conduct of their future life. Margaret, after a morning that required all her self-command, saw her mother attempting to sleep, and then went to her own room. The extent of her loss was forcing itself upon her more and more; and the reaction consequent upon the exertion she had been making soon came. A sense of misery, such as she had never before experienced, overpowered her; not the shrinking from present grief, but a vague indescribable fear; the first consciousness of what it might be in the capacity of man to suffer; the first glimpse into that deep, dark gulf of woe, which can never be fathomed save in the unseen world.

With those who have cast off religion, despair is

the only refuge in sorrow ; but Margaret's anguish was but momentary, for the God whom she served was near to comfort her. Speculative difficulties were less frequently suggested to her mind than they had been, and she had learnt how to deal with them ; and now, after a quarter of an hour spent in solitude, she wandered into the garden, with a spirit subdued, but comparatively at peace. She wished to find her uncle. His society was the only relief she could have ; but he was not there, and she was joined by Craven and Agatha. It had required some effort on Margaret's part to meet her brother cordially when he first arrived at home. She did not think that he was the sole cause of her father's illness, but she could not forget that it was the shock which his follies had caused that brought it to a climax. Craven felt this fully himself. He was in manner a changed person. Perhaps no other event would have been sufficient to check him in his career of extravagance ; but this served as a constant memento. Every time he heard from home he was reminded of the distress there ; that they were suffering, when he, by reason of his father's kindness, was just rejoicing in the relief from a load of care. Craven was not so much selfish by nature as by habits of personal indulgence. The better feelings of his heart were awakened, and the resolution which he had once more taken, never again to resort to the gaming-table, had, up to the present moment, been strictly kept. He was happier from the sense of self-control, if not from any higher cause ; but there was no happiness for him when he returned home. It is one thing to hear of sorrow at a distance,—another to be present with it. Craven's grief, when he found, on reaching the Grove, that there really was no hope of his father's recovery, quite softened Margaret's heart ; and now,

though his frame of mind was not likely to be quite congenial, she willingly put her arm within his, and showed in manner though not in words that it gave her satisfaction to be with him. The subject in her own mind was not, however, one which could be shared with him. She was thinking of her father and of all that had been gone through for the last month, and gaining comfort from the retrospection, which neither Craven nor Agatha would have understood. Margaret could not at such a moment, and upon such a topic, risk an observation, and silence seemed preferred by mutual consent. Agatha especially appeared indisposed for conversation: she looked ill, and her features, sharpened by grief and vexation, had lost something of their beauty in consequence; but the general expression was softer and more subdued.

"I must go to-morrow," said Craven, rather abruptly.

"Must you so soon? surely they will spare you a few more days for my mother's sake."

"The army is not a profession which considers private interests much, I imagine," observed Agatha.

"No, I must go.—I shall not be back here for an age."

"Then you will not be back here at all," replied Margaret.

Agatha looked up quickly, and said,—"I did not know that was certain."

"Did you not? I supposed we all knew it. It has been talked of long, and my mother is prepared for it."

Craven put his hand to his forehead. "Horrible folly!" he muttered.

"Nay, dear Craven; it may not be as bad as

you think," said Margaret, with a great effort to conceal the pain which the idea actually gave her. "Change may be good for us; and, independent of you, it is most probable that, under the present circumstances, it would have come."

"The house would be too large soon," remarked Agatha; "you away, and George and Philip at college and at school."

"And even if it were not," added Margaret, "houses are encumbrances, except where people are grand enough to have eldest sons."

"Or unfortunate enough," again muttered Craven.

"I do not see what we are to do, though," said Agatha; "has my uncle any notion?"

The "we" was not agreeable to Margaret: she had once or twice lately flattered herself that Agatha's temper was altering, and becoming less wilful, and that some happy coincidence of circumstances might bring about a reconciliation with her husband. She made no reply to the question, until Agatha repeated,—

"Has my uncle any notion?"

"No, I have not spoken to him; but I must, if poor mamma does not; something must be settled soon."

Craven could not bear the conversation. Margaret's quiet manner did not hide from him what was really underneath.—"Margaret, you are an angel," he whispered, and withdrawing his arm, he turned into a side-walk.

"I think so too, sometimes, Margaret," said Agatha, when they were left together; "you have to bear with all."

"There would be little to bear," replied Margaret, "if it were not for one's own faults; they make one weak."

"Yes; but you have fewer than most people."

Margaret expressed neither surprise nor pain at the assertion. It would only have brought upon her a repetition of the unfounded praise.—"These are times to feel weak," she said; "I used to think I could bear trial well."

"Did you? I never did."

"It is easier for some people to act than to bear," said Margaret; "easier for me, I think."

"I am not sure that it is for me."—Agatha mused for a few moments, and then added, with more of excitement than was usual—"this strange day—it is like a dream."

"From which we shall never wake," replied Margaret; "nothing now can make life what it has been, at least to me."

"Nor to me," and Agatha heaved a sigh.

"Would you have it so?" asked Margaret, whilst she strove to gather the true answer in her sister's face.

Agatha's dark blue eyes were dimmed with tears, as she rejoined, "Mine has not been a happy life."

"As a child it was."

"No,—not happy: contented only. I have never had what I wished."

"Then no one can be happy," said Margaret.

"And no one is. Oh, Margaret! this world is very wearisome."

"Most wretched, if it were not for one's duties," said Margaret.

"But I have no duties, no object; why should I live?"

Margaret hesitated a little, and then with a sudden resolution, as seizing an opportunity which she saw ought not to be neglected, she said, "But, Agatha, this need not be. No one could have

plainer duties than yourself, if you would look at them."

Agatha made a gesture of impatience, and stooped to gather a flower.

"We must not be vexed with each other to-day, dearest, of all days," continued Margaret; "we have no love now to throw away."

"I have told you often that I will not bear interference," replied Agatha, proudly.

"Yes, and I never meant to interfere. I only thought of your happiness."

"Thank you, Margaret," and Agatha smiled bitterly; "but you are wasting your thoughts upon that which does not, and cannot exist.—Peace I may have at home; but happiness nowhere."

"Peace in your own true home," persisted Margaret: "if you were enabled to return to it."

"Peace! with a weak, heartless, ignorant man, whose every word is a reproach to me for the folly of marrying him?"

Margaret's memory travelled back many, many months; to the conversation which she had held with Agatha at Rouen on the night when the intended marriage had been acknowledged. She had, however, too much kindness of heart to refer to her own prophecies, and merely answered, "If you were now living at Ashington, trying to please your husband, and bear with his temper, and doing good to the utmost of your power, I think you must find peace; here, there must always be a consciousness that you are not in your proper place."

"You wish me to leave you," exclaimed Agatha; "I have often thought I was a burden."

"You do not mean what you say, dear Agatha," replied Margaret, with perfect mildness; "the affection of your own family you must always

have; if you had not been persuaded of this, you never would have proposed returning to us. But it is no question of liking or disliking, simply of duty."

"And who is to make the first advance?" inquired Agatha, in a more gentle tone; "Colonel Clive has never inquired about me; he has been quite satisfied with my absence."

"I do not think you are a fair judge of this; for you can have heard nothing about him. But I do not pretend to say how such advances could be made; all I think is, that Ashington is your rightful home, and that nothing can go well until you are restored to it."

Agatha strongly remonstrated against the notion; insisting that the difference of their position must incapacitate her sister from forming a correct judgment.

"It was not my judgment only," replied Margaret, gravely and sorrowfully; "there was another which we shall ever be bound to respect, that entirely coincided with it."

"My father's," said Agatha, in a faltering voice, "but he did not know the circumstances."

"He guessed that you were remaining here because you were not happy at Ashington; and several times he said that he wished it could be otherwise. Think what he would have felt if he had known the truth."

Margaret's manner became very earnest, and Agatha was not untouched by it. A few tears rolled down her cheek, and she turned to Margaret and kissed her; and, as Mr. Sutherland approached, walked quickly away in order not to betray her unusual emotion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was more the natural temper of Margaret's mind to look up and be advised, than to give advice to others; and with her uncle she was now quite at ease. There were no subjects on which they had not a common interest. That which was at the moment the most present to her, the thought of her father, was one in which he could entirely sympathise; for Mr. Sutherland, more than any other person, had been admitted into Dr. Percival's confidence. They paced the lawn together for the next hour, recalling little scenes and trifling words, and dwelling upon the many mercies which had been mixed up with this great affliction, and Margaret found consolation in her uncle's presence, and spoke openly of herself, and did not then think that any safer guide or better friend could be found than a devoted English clergyman. Yet she acknowledged that her mind was not yet clear. Doubts were banished, but they would return. "They come at most painful moments," she said, as Mr. Sutherland warned her that it would be long before they would leave her. "Last week there were times which I can scarcely venture to recall; when I was sitting with dear papa, and every thing was still. He asked me once himself what was the matter, and it seemed so strange. He never used to notice our manner."

"He had no leisure," said Mr. Sutherland; "perhaps it was happy for him in some ways; he was saved much that might have vexed him."

"Yes," replied Margaret, struggling against the overpowering rush of early recollections; "it gives me such pleasure now to think what a happy home he had. When we were quite little things, mamma always tried to make us good before he came back; not to worry him."

"There were many mercies which followed him through his whole life," said Mr. Sutherland; "but none so great as at the last."

"The quiet sinking," replied Margaret, in an under tone, "and the time for retrospection."

'And the spirit to profit by the opportunity," continued Mr. Sutherland; "we can never be sufficiently grateful for that."

Margaret's voice was choked when she would have answered; but with strong resolution she resumed her self-command. "It is a great change," she said, after a short silence; "I am sure we cannot tell yet how great."

"If an uncle's love could supply the loss of a father's, Margaret, you should never know a moment's regret."

Margaret pressed her uncle's arm, but she could not thank him in words; and he added, with the wish to divert her thoughts, "You must come to me now for every thing; I would share all, if possible, for there will be much that will press heavily upon you, though we may be certain that it will be good in the end."

"It is good," said Margaret, "I feel it now. It prevents me from thinking; and I am selfish through all this. I cannot help looking back to the past."

"And the Countess Novera?" said Mr. Sutherland.

"Yes, I blame myself for allowing any thought except one to occupy me; but it seems that all would be so much lighter, if this were not added."

It was a grief hard to console, and Mr. Sutherland did not attempt it. "It would have been easier," he answered, "if it had been the will of God. Yet you must remember, that now, from other circumstances, you must have been separated."

"But not with anger and silence," replied Margaret. "Yet how could my miserable words have offended her?"

"It may be the confessor's command."

Margaret shook her head doubtfully. "Father Andrea is too wise for that. He knows that Beatrice can have nothing to fear from me; no, it is in her own mind. I saw that something was working there when I last talked with her. She required more confidence, and I would have given it. I would have told her every thing; but it is too late."

"My own dear child, you must indeed endeavour to forget," said Mr. Sutherland, affectionately.

"I do endeavour; I do more than endeavour, I pray; yet I am wretched. Uncertainty is very trying."

"If it were but possible to comfort you, Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Sutherland; "but you can say for yourself all that I would say; and you would think me cold. There must, however, be some satisfaction in the sacrifice."

"Sometimes, for a few moments; but it is not a willing sacrifice; I am not resigned. Now, especially, Beatrice would have felt for me so truly."

"And do you not think that sympathy might only in the end have increased your unhappiness?"

"No, no," replied Margaret. "I could bear all with comparative cheerfulness. I could leave my home, I could work for my daily bread, and I hope not murmur, if I had seen her but once more: if I had only been assured that her love was unchanged.

But we parted, if not in anger, in mistrust; and I must bear the burden upon my heart for ever."

Mr. Sutherland would have suggested the possibility of the Countess's writing even then; but he deemed it best that Margaret should not buoy herself up with what might after all prove a false hope, and he desired to turn her from all reminiscences connected with Romanism. Her mind was less variable; but it was not yet strong, he could not expect it to be so. "I have seen your mother within the last hour," he said, willing to change the conversation; "she seems better than I had expected. She has made me promise to stay here over Sunday, if my duty can be taken; there will be much to arrange." A dreadful sense of loneliness pressed upon Margaret's broken spirit. The tide of sorrow returned upon her, and she leant against a tree, and cried freely. Mr. Sutherland was glad that she had given way, for it was better than the self-restraint which she had been exerting. He made her sit down on a bench, and did not try to stop her grief; but when she became more composed, he led her to talk upon the plans which must soon be settled. There was a hope that by the time all Dr. Percival's affairs were put in order, a sufficient sum would remain to enable them to live together comfortably, with very strict economy. The Grove must be let or sold; but the mortgages upon it would render it of little value. A few debts there were, and the remainder of the insurances; but the privations and difficulties caused by Craven's extravagance were irremediable.

"I cannot see my way clearly yet," said Mr. Sutherland, "as to your future home; I have thought of two or three places where Philip might go to school; but they are all objectionable."

"Dear papa used to talk of George remaining at college," said Margaret: "will that be possible?"

"That is one thing I am most anxious to have decided. It seems now as if it could not be."

Margaret had long tried to prepare herself for this; yet it came to her with a shock. "I would do any thing," she exclaimed, with sudden energy — "I would work, slave, rather than that his hopes should be blighted. And Craven, — it is hard to be charitable to him when one thinks of George."

"Only that events are not at our ordering," replied her uncle. "Craven's faults appear to us to be the cause of George's disappointment; but if it were not the will of God that his plan of life should be changed, we should find that some other means of keeping him at college would be provided."

"And he will go into a merchant's office then," said Margaret, trying to speak contentedly; but in a moment she added — "his reading, and talents, and his high principles, and strength of character; all to be buried in a counting-house!"

"Not buried, Margaret. Where God places them, there they must be destined to be useful. George would be the last person to speak of being buried any where."

"George will be more vexed than you think," said Margaret; "I am sure he is not prepared for this."

Mr. Sutherland became more grave than before. "I will trust him," he said, "to bear it as a Christian should do. The principle which has never been weakened by vice is equal to any trial."

At that instant George came into the garden with the children. They were clinging to him with a half-bewildered manner, sometimes speaking cheerfully, and then lowering their voices and remembering "poor mamma," and wondering why

the garden and all were so changed. Harriet walked close to her brother's side. Her eyes were red with crying, and she tried to stop the thoughtless remarks of the little ones. Margaret fondly watched her brother as he drew near. The quick intelligence of his eye, his handsome face, and the thoughtfulness of his quiet, gentlemanly manner, could never, she thought, be destined for a counting-house. Mr. Sutherland had said that if it were the will of God, some means of keeping him at college would be provided. Then it was not clear yet that he was destined for a merchant; and Margaret said to herself that she would leave no plan untried — she would devote herself, to the utmost point of duty, to prevent her favourite brother from being disappointed in his prospects for life.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

For a short time our attention must be turned from the sad and changing scenes which were passing at the Grove, to the active, noisy, engrossing world of the metropolis. In the same fashionable hotel, formed expressly for luxury and gaiety, in which the Countess Novera had spent the few weeks of her first residence in London, she was again domesticated with Lucia. The heat of London was intense, its bustle distracting, its society little calculated to soothe a wounded spirit; but Beatrice was in no state to think of change. She was lying helpless and miserable upon a sick-bed, suffering the punishment of the vain endeavours by which she had sought upon her arrival to occupy her time and thoughts, and forget Margaret and Henningsley. The Countess Novera was proud; it was the distinguishing characteristic of her family. She had yielded with enthusiasm to her love for Margaret, overlooking the distinctions of rank, and breaking down the barriers of reserve; at times, even humbling herself in her own eyes, that so she might the more fully win the confidence of her friend; and her affection had, she now persuaded herself, been made a matter of calculation; her advances had been met only in form; reciprocal confidence had been withheld; and the hope of conversion upon which she had so firmly relied, she believed to be but a mark assumed for the purpose of more easily gaining her friendship. It would

have been a severe disappointment for any person; for the Countess Novera it was in the utmost degree humiliating. She had no gentle thoughts of Margaret upon leaving Henningsley: she expected to hear from her; but she had made up her mind that the letter would only prove more clearly that the reports which Lucia had brought were correct. Days went by, however, and no letter arrived. Beatrice thought of writing herself, but she did not know what tone to assume. There was no just cause of offence, yet she could not write warmly; and to write coldly would be worse than not at all. If Margaret really cared for her silence, it was certain that she would, as she had often done before, expostulate; and the expostulation might possibly show that in all she had professed she was sincere. If she did not care — the Countess's spirit was roused to indignation by the bare idea, — the sooner Margaret was forgotten the better. All this was very unjust, very hasty, very unlike what Margaret would have felt in a similar case, and, if Father Andrea had been near, the Countess might have been brought to a more reasonable, charitable mind. But he was absent still; detained on pressing business of his Church, and so engaged, that Beatrice did not like to obtrude her own vexations upon his attention. Left to the society of Lucia, the Countess plunged into the distractions of London life. She had no taste for frivolities, nor any love of admiration; and she was told by the physicians whom she consulted, that her health would require the utmost care; but her acquaintances were ready to assure her, that care did not mean seclusion; and a few, pretending to much knowledge of her case, laughed at the idea of enlivening society being injurious as long as she was not exposed to cold. Beatrice scarcely allowed that

she was pleased or amused; but she was occupied, and occupation to a mind of such energy was the one great desideratum. The imprudence, however, was soon punished. After a few weeks of that which the world calls gaiety, but which by the Countess was felt to be a senseless, often unhappy, waste of time, she was obliged to confess herself seriously ill. It was proposed to send for Father Andrea; and Lady Anstruther, the only one of her relations who was admitted to see her, looked sorrowfully at Lucia, and prophesied that after such a serious attack the Countess could little expect to pass another winter in England.

Then Lucia, it may be supposed, had obtained her object, and was contented. But contentment was not the expression of her face as she stood by the Countess's bed-side, and marked the havoc which disease had made. She was pale almost as Beatrice herself; her eyes had lost their brilliancy, and her lips were parched with fever of mind and body. Her movements were startling, and unfitted for a sick room, and her restlessness, and unsteady hand, often made the Countess beg that she would give up the wish of nursing her, and leave her to the care of servants. Lucia sometimes refused; but as often she consented. The pleasure of being with Beatrice was gone. Hasty words or coldness repelled her, and kind ones were a reproach, bitter beyond imagination. She would frequently rush from the room suddenly, merely to avoid the Countess's thanks. They were not deserved, for she had injured her; and they were not hearty, though Beatrice did her utmost to make them so. The Countess, after a few days, rallied from her alarming attack, and Father Andrea's return was postponed in consequence. Beatrice proposed this herself, though sadly against her will. His presence would have

been an unspeakable comfort; and she expected him with the impatience of a child, and with the conviction that even her health would improve if he were near to advise her. Some things he was certain to decide rightly — whether it would be desirable to risk a return to Henningsley; and if not, whether they should remain in England for the summer, or go at once to Italy; at all events, what directions should be given for carrying out their plans for the Henningsley peasantry. All these points weighed upon the Countess's mind; she was eager that they should be settled. Illness was making hourly inroads upon her constitution, and vexation was wearing her spirits; and when a prospect of peace opened before her, it was only as in fancy she pictured herself calmly sinking into the grave, soothed by the hallowed offices of religion.

But Father Andrea's arrival was to Lucia an event to be dreaded above all others. During the time when he had been expected, she was almost desperate with fear and doubt as to how she could hide from him the secrets of her heart.

Lucia had been guilty of a gross violation of the laws of honour to satisfy her jealousy, and no sooner was the act committed than she perceived the difficulties of her position. Without confession there could be no absolution. If she confessed to Father Andrea, he could not betray her, but he would doubtless insist upon her acknowledging the truth to Beatrice. This would happen whilst they were in England, and the sacrifice of principle which she had made would prove useless, for an explanation with Margaret must necessarily follow. The difficulty could be avoided in one way only. The Countess was still constantly alluding to Lucia's departure, for Lady Anstruther was inclined to hasten her intended journey, and set

off immediately. Lucia had sinned to gratify her wish of remaining with the Countess, and now the sin itself was forcing her to leave her. If she could go with Lady Anstruther into the country, and remain with her until they embarked, she might avoid Father Andrea, and wait for her confession until she arrived in Italy. By that time it was nearly certain that Beatrice herself would have left England, and the estrangement from Margaret would be completed. Priests might be found less rigid than Father Andrea, who would not insist upon the open acknowledgment of her guilt; or, if this were not so, she did not despair under any circumstances of obtaining the Countess's forgiveness, if only she could keep her secret until Beatrice was beyond the possible reach of Margaret's influence.

There was, however, no time to be lost. Even a short delay might bring Father Andrea back, and circumstances might then prevent her from carrying out her plan. The Countess was surprised at the change in Lucia's views. Before, the very mention of Italy had caused a clouded brow, if not a burst of tears; but now the subject of the return was entered upon with warmth. Lucia discussed Lady Anstruther's proposed journey, and strenuously advocated the idea of an instant departure; and when difficulties were started as to the preparations, she suggested, and afterwards urgently insisted upon leaving the Countess with her maid to await Father Andrea's arrival, and proceeding herself with Lady Anstruther into Devonshire, in order to assist her in arranging all things necessary for the journey, and subsequent residence abroad. The idea was seconded by the Countess, who was too ill to have any pleasure in society, and was burdened rather than comforted by having Lucia with her. Still there were further delays very awkward and in-

convenient for Lucia's wishes, and she could ill bear them. Conscience was not asleep; and it goaded her sometimes almost to the point of confession to the Countess, but shame and jealousy kept her back. She could have submitted to anger and reproaches, but not to have seen Margaret re-established in the Countess's affection. And so the days glided on, sadly and monotonously to the Countess; yet each one full of fear and anxiety to Lucia. Lady Anstruther fixed her time for going into the country, but the journey was postponed. She fixed again, and still there was something to be done; whilst the post brought constant announcements that Father Andrea's business must soon be finished, and that he was longing for the time when he might rejoin them.

"You will see him after all, Lucia," said the Countess, as the letters were laid upon the table one morning, before she had left her room. "I do not mean, of course, that you would, under any circumstances, have left England without seeing him; but he will be here whilst you are still in town."

"Indeed! are you sure?" Lucia's colour changed rapidly. "Does he say so himself?"

"He does not mention any particular time, but he defers some important matters till we meet, which he trusts will be much sooner than he at first anticipated."

"Lady Anstruther is to let me know her movements for certain this morning," replied Lucia, becoming very uneasy; "she talked of going this afternoon."

"I scarcely think she will have finished all she has to do so soon," observed the Countess.

Lucia left the room quickly, finding the conversation insupportable, and determined that, as far as it lay in her power, Lady Anstruther should not stay

another day. There was no cause, however, for any interference on her part. Lady Anstruther sent word that she was quite ready, and would come to the hotel at one o'clock, say good-bye to the Countess, and then take Lucia away. Her arrangements seemed to be made so decidedly that Beatrice considered it would be useless to attempt to alter them. She could not, however, avoid expressing some surprise that Lucia should appear anxious to go.

"Father Andrea had been absent from them for several weeks," she said, "and it would have appeared natural for her to wish to see him, though only for a few minutes."

Lucia replied "that she did wish to see him," — it was one among many falsehoods into which she had lately been led, — "but she considered it would be troublesome to make another change — in fact, as the case stood, it was impossible." The Countess did not question this, and was not particularly interested in the matter; the alteration of a day made little difference to her, though it was every thing to Lucia.

"It seems sudden at the last," she said, kindly; "though I have expected it. Are you sure, dear child, that this notion of yours is wise? Might it not be better, after all, to stay with me till the very last?"

Lucia's equanimity was upset by the tone of affection, and she answered, half in reproach, and half in sadness, — "If I could have been useful, I would have remained always, Signora. But Lauretta is more to you than I am."

"More in actually attending upon me, because she has been accustomed to my ways. But do not think of me, Lucia; think of yourself. Shall you like going with Lady Anstruther to her home?"

"I shall like nothing when I am away from you; but I must be accustomed to it."

"Nay, you must remember that I am almost sure to follow you soon; Lady Anstruther has a full dependance upon it. She is to travel in Italy for some months, and in the winter we are to share the Palazzo Novera together. But you will be almost as near to me as she will be. We shall see each other constantly."

"Never, never, as before."

"It might be quite as before, dear Lucia, if you would expect from me that only which I can give. And have I ever deceived you?"

"It was my own folly," murmured Lucia; "I thought that earth could contain another love such as mine, but it cannot." The Countess was silent, and Lucia continued — "And I shall never live with you again; we shall meet occasionally as strangers."

"Oh, Lucia, that is cruel to me! A stranger! — you, whom I shall ever feel myself bound to protect, and from whom I am parting solely because it is not in my power to render you happy!"

Lucia sank into a gloomy reverie, which was broken by a simple observation from Beatrice, that yet made her start as if an adder had stung her.

"I shall write to you when I hear of your friends at Henningsley."

"Yes, if you please:" the sentence ended abruptly, and Lucia again became abstracted.

"Can Lauretta help you?" said the Countess. "It is late."

Lucia rose in an instant. "I forgot — yes, I must go;" yet she lingered still.

"And what message shall I give to Father Andrea?" inquired the Countess.

"Message!" slowly repeated Lucia.

"Yes, he will expect something."

"I am sorry, very sorry; but it cannot be helped; it is not my doing."

"No, indeed, who would suspect you of that? But I shall send him to see you before you sail."

"There will scarcely be time," said Lucia, in a hurried tone; "and the distance is great; and he has been away from you so long."

"I have borne his absence for weeks," replied Beatrice, "and a day or so will not make much difference. You shall see him, certainly, if it can possibly be managed."

Lucia did not venture to object further; but she would not pursue the subject.

"Lady Anstruther says nothing about the governess, does she?" inquired the Countess, as Lucia was leaving her.

"No; she told me yesterday, Signora, that she had described exactly what she wanted; and that she fully depended upon your finding some one to suit her."

"She requires so much," said Beatrice, musingly; "perfection; and where is it to be met with?"

"I am annoyed that she should have troubled you about it," continued Lucia. "It would have been much kinder to have arranged every thing herself."

"I cannot blame her, Lucia. The little girl must have change immediately; so that she is obliged to set off, and has no time for inquiries; and I am only to see the persons who apply, and then decide."

"And perhaps you will be ill, and be obliged to write letters, and talk; and you are not equal to any exertion," said Lucia, almost inclined at the idea to change her plan, and remain.

Beatrice leant back, fatigued even with this short conversation, but Lucia could not indulge her affection. The moments were precious, and at the risk

of appearing unfeeling and ungrateful, she was obliged to give up the care of the Countess to Lauretta, and prepare for leaving her at a time when especially the presence of a friend would have been a blessing.

Lady Anstruther came punctually to her appointment. She had been fortunate in transacting all her business, and was impatient to go. "Her child," she said, "was pining for the country air, and every day was of consequence to her; otherwise she would, on no account, have hurried Lucia away." The Countess detained her in conversation about the governess, and insisted that luncheon should be ordered before they set off. "For Lucia's sake it was necessary, as she had eaten scarcely any breakfast, and had rather a long journey before her." Lucia was wandering about the room in great nervous agitation, pretending to seek for things which she knew were not wanted, and occasionally standing at the window, to watch the impatient horses; and trying to make some observation which should bring Lady Anstruther's final instructions to a close.

"Then you will remember, she must be high-principled, clever, and accomplished; and a lady by birth and education." Lucia heard at last, — "I quite depend upon you."

"And now you will take some luncheon?" said the Countess.

Lucia was relieved. She was moving from the window, when her attention was arrested. A cab had driven up to the door of the hotel — nothing unusual, yet Lucia staid to observe who might alight. It was a traveller, certainly, for some luggage was first taken out. Lucia's eyes rested upon a travelling-case, of a peculiar shape and size. She recognised it, and her heart sickened. In another moment Father Andrea alighted.

"Lucia, cara, you must come," said the Countess, in her softest, sweetest tone. But an angel's voice would have been unheeded at that instant. Lucia was immoveable. "She is in a reverie," said the Countess, smiling; and she went to the window.

Lucia started, when a light touch was laid upon her shoulder: she strove to be unconcerned, but her uneasy glance was again directed to the street, and the Countess's eye followed hers.

"It is Father Andrea!" exclaimed Beatrice, with eager delight. She stood with the door half open listening for the confessor's footsteps. Lady Anstruther watched from the window, and no thought was given to the conscience-stricken Lucia, who had sunk trembling into the nearest chair. "Yet," she said to herself, "it was a foolish fear; it would be the delay but of a few minutes."

"Only just in time, father," was the Countess's salutation, as she took the confessor's hand affectionately. "Lucia would have been miserable if you had come an hour later."

Lucia was miserable then, if the unsettled, wild eye, and quivering lip told a true tale, and Father Andrea was not miserable, but very disturbed. He looked intently at the Countess.

"My daughter, you are sadly altered."

"I have been ill, father, as I wrote you word; but I shall be well now you are here. And do not think of me, — think of Lucia; she is just going."

Father Andrea turned to Lucia a glance very different from that which he had directed to the Countess. It was coldly stern, and Lucia quailed beneath it. Yet why should she fear? What could Father Andrea know?

"Lady Anstruther will pardon me," said the confessor. "I would willingly retain both my daughters for a few days. We have been some

weeks separated. If she can satisfactorily arrange for a solitary journey to-day, I will take care that her companion shall join her before the end of the week; or sooner if possible."

Lady Anstruther was provoked; she thought the confessor troublesome and interfering, and secretly rejoiced that her own movements were free from any such control. Lucia sat perfectly passive. She could discover no precise cause for alarm; but the distant prospect of a confession being forced upon her, took from her all her remaining strength. She did not, however, dare raise an objection, and as Lady Anstruther prepared to go, she hurriedly murmured a few unintelligible words of regret, construed into annoyance at the unlooked-for postponement of her journey. Beatrice alone was pleased. It was true that Father Andrea was stern, but so he was always; and to her his manner was anxiously paternal.

"Most fortunate, is it not?" she said, turning to speak to Lucia.

But the words were thrown away, for, profiting by the slight confusion consequent upon the entrance of servants, the counter orders, and Lady Anstruther's departure, Lucia had escaped to her own chamber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

We must look again at the Grove, on the day preceding Father Andrea's appearance in London. There was a more natural appearance about the house and garden ; an air of greater life, and, where the children were, of cheerfulness. Grace and Philip ran races in the garden, and little Juliet picked daisies upon the lawn, and Harriet sat under the trees with a book in her hand, and Margaret made the circuit of the gravel walk with Miss Debrett, and tried to reconcile her to the prospect of losing her best friends.

"For poor mamma's sake," she said, "I could wish it had been otherwise, but I am not sure for my own. All is changed now."

"Yes, my dear, certainly, as you say, all is changed. Your poor dear father! it came very sudden at last. But I don't see what you are to do any where else."

"My uncle thinks there is a house at Alton which would suit us. It would be a great comfort to be in his parish."

"A great comfort, indeed; but you will miss the garden; and this neighbourhood is so healthy, and — I won't complain, my love, indeed I won't ; but what shall I do without you?" Miss Debrett's tears, always easily called forth, flowed rapidly.

"We shall only be sixteen miles off," said Margaret, endeavouring to forget her own griefs to console another's.

"A hundred you mean, as far as I can get at you! and bad roads, — three gates I know in the cross-road — and the expense. No, you are gone, and I had better make up my mind to it at once."

"And go away too," said Margaret, who had before tried to fix upon some plan of moderating Miss Debrett's distress, which had been vehement ever since the idea of a removal was made known.

"And where am I to go, my dear? I, who have not a friend in the world; not one but all of you nor a relation either."

"Except Mrs. Duncan, at Eastlake," said Margaret.

"Ah! poor Anne Duncan!" A fit of perverseness had seized Miss Debrett, and she was rather provoked at being told that she was not absolutely friendless. "A very good woman Anne Duncan is, but fidgetty; and only a cousin. Cousins go for nothing, — one has so many."

Margaret could scarcely refrain from a smile at the contradiction. "Well," she answered, "if Eastlake will not do, we must come and see you as often as we can here."

"But it won't be the same, my dear; not at all the same."

"Not at all," repeated Margaret from her heart, and her eye wandered over the garden, and dwelt sorrowfully upon the well-known shrubs and flowers; and as the happy, thoughtless hours of her childhood arose to view, she forgot that she was walking with Miss Debrett, and fell into a melancholy dream of the past. Miss Debrett's plaintive tones soon awoke her.

"And when do you go, my dear? I do want to know every thing, and you never tell me."

"Because I cannot. We are quite unsettled. Hardly any thing is arranged yet. Poor mamma's

spirits are very bad, and she cannot attend to business; and my uncle must leave us again to-morrow. He is here as often as he can be, but his parish requires his attention."

"Oh, then, Mr. Sutherland is with you now?"

"Yes, he came the day before yesterday, and George is to go back with him for a little change."

"Poor George! I hear he is looking very unwell; and somebody said he was to leave college. Is that true?"

"I cannot tell; nothing is decided," said Margaret, disliking to approach the subject.

"But it will be very bad for him if he is; he will be dreadfully disappointed."

"I am afraid so; but we are not sure it will be necessary, and we endeavour not to think about it."

"You must think, my dear; what can you do if you don't?"

"We try to remember that 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,'" said Margaret, in an earnest tone.

"You are right there, of course; yet some things must be thought about: and how you are to manage this without thinking, I can't imagine."

"We are waiting for a letter from Mr. Dampier," said Margaret; "perhaps he will change his mind, and consent to help George at college, instead of putting him into the counting-house."

"I wish he may, Margaret, but I would not depend upon him. They are a curious race, the Dampiers. Very strange ways, I hear, he has, and his father, you know, was quite odd."

Margaret looked round, half hoping to see her uncle with a letter in his hand. He had been disappointed in the morning, she told Miss Debrett, and had sent a special messenger to Alton, in the

hope that Mr. Dampier's letter might have been directed there.

Mr. Sutherland did not appear until some minutes afterwards, and then he had no letter. The messenger had not returned; but he warned Margaret against being sanguine, as Mr. Dampier was not likely to change his mind.

"No, that I am sure of," said Miss Debrett; "so, my dear, perhaps it is better, as you said, not to think about it; and we will talk of something else. Do you know that Colonel Clive is laid up at Ashington, very ill?"

"Rather unwell, you mean, do you not?" inquired Mr. Sutherland. "I saw Mr. Harrison this morning, and he told me of it."

"Well! very ill, or very unwell, there does not seem much difference to me; at any rate he is very mopy, and not able to go out; and Mrs. St. Aubyn declares it is as much as she can do to amuse him."

"Poor man!" said Mr. Sutherland.

"Well! you say poor man, do you? and so do I. I don't mean to blame Agatha, dear child! but certainly she did manage to leave her husband very lonely. As Mrs. St. Aubyn observed, it was a thousand pities they ever married, if they are to go on in this way all their lives."

"Did Mrs. St. Aubyn say that really?" inquired Margaret.

"Yes, and a good deal more. To tell you the truth, Margaret, I suspect she is a little tired of nursing him. Men are troublesome when they are ill, — so fractious."

Margaret agreed, but she was not exactly thinking of what she said. Agatha was principally in her mind. A wife's place at such a time ought surely to be at her husband's side.

"Shall I find your mother in the house?" asked Miss Debrett, finding that the conversation languished.

"Yes; I will look for her, if you will wait here."

Miss Debrett declined the offer. It was rather an amusement to her to go from room to room, searching behind doors, and inquiring of every one where Mrs. Percival could possibly be. But in a short time this pleasure also would be taken from her. Her wishes reverted to Eastlake, and she almost decided that if Mrs. Percival went away from the Grove, she would accept her cousin Anne's proposal to live with her. Margaret and Mr. Sutherland, left alone, gave utterance to the ideas which were uppermost in both their minds.

"If Agatha could but see her duty!" said Margaret. "Now there really seems an opening. Mrs. St. Aubyn could effect a reconciliation, I am sure."

"Are you? But I am not. Agatha's offence must be very unpardonable in a husband's eyes; and Colonel Clive's temper is not forgiving."

"My greatest fear is that they would separate again," said Margaret.

"I hope not that," replied her uncle; "Agatha has suffered: she is not as wilful as she was, and even pride might go some way towards rendering her forbearing. She is conscious that her position is humiliating. I mean to speak to her myself when I can find an occasion, so as to prepare the way for any future advances."

Margaret was glad that the burden was taken from her, but she had little or no hope that any good would result, her own efforts had proved so unsuccessful. She was going to express this, when Grace ran up to them with a letter, holding it out at first that it might be seen, and immediately hiding it behind her, and making them guess what she had

brought, with childish ignorance of the annoyance she was inflicting by the delay.

"Give it me please, Grace, dear," said Margaret, even then not allowing irritation to get the better of her habitual watchfulness. "It was brought from Alton, was it not?"

"Yes, only this minute. Humphries has just taken the mare into the stable."

Mr. Sutherland looked at the direction, — "It is from Mr. Dampier; and now we shall see." He broke the seal, and Margaret leant over him to read also. Both their faces assumed a grave look of disappointment as they went on. The letter was very short and very decisive. Mr. Dampier's determination was unchangeable. "He would take one of Dr Percival's sons, either his godson George, or the youngest boy Philip, educate him, and place him in his own office, but he would assist the family in no other way. He did not see the good of young men indulging fancies as to a profession; and if George were fool enough not to value the offer which was now made him, perhaps his little brother might be wiser."

"Then there is no hope at all!" exclaimed Margaret, as her rapid eye reached the last words, "he is condemned for life."

Mr. Sutherland did not reply till he had carefully re-perused every sentence; "Margaret, my dear, it is a disappointment; but we must not be ungrateful. Mr. Dampier promises a great deal, and we ought not to think upon second causes."

"No, — I am aware of that;" and Margaret's manner changed from impatience into quiet regret. "It is not Mr. Dampier's doing. Poor George!"

"I feel for your mother too. Her heart was set upon this, and she has been hoping against all my warning."

"And against all our knowledge of Mr. Dampier's character," said Margaret; "but really the manner neutralizes the gift. To be obliged to such a man! George to be patronized, as it were! — it will be galling."

"No man is patronized, Margaret, in the bad sense of the word, who does not bring the patronage upon himself. George will be grateful to Mr. Dampier, but he will never sacrifice his principle to him, and until he does this he will be independent."

Margaret walked by her uncle in thoughtful silence. An idea was recurring to her, which had presented itself several times before, but which she had not indulged, in the hope that Mr. Dampier's kindness might obviate the necessity. "It is the question of a few years only," she said; "George has already kept several terms; every body says he will have a fellowship eventually, and he thinks himself he might gain a scholarship at once. It seems very hard to be obliged to give up such prospects merely for the want of a small yearly sum."

"Yes, it does seem hard. I have thought of all possible ways of preventing it. I could live perhaps upon rather less myself, but that would not make the difference."

"No, no," exclaimed Margaret. "You must not be troubled, of all persons."

"It is the parish which must not suffer," said Mr. Sutherland; "and then with regard to raising money, George and I agree that it would not be right. He would not be justified in incurring a debt, to be repaid from the proceeds of his curacy, or even his living."

"I see that, and the fellowship, or pupils, I suppose you would say, are uncertain?"

"Yes; all these obstacles appear so many indica-

tions that to be a clergyman is not his part in life. We must learn to act upon faith, and read the will of God in outward circumstances."

Margaret twisted the handle of her parasol rapidly; then was beginning to speak, but stopped, and presently asked something about the time.

"Four o'clock," said Mr. Sutherland; "we had better go in."

No objection was made, and they walked on slowly. Margaret's excitement of manner became more evident, and at length, before they reached the house, she said, without any preface:—

"I know one or two persons in this neighbourhood who would give me a hundred a year for teaching their children."

Mr. Sutherland perceived her meaning instantly. He paused, and looked at her doubtingly, but with great interest: "Margaret, are you sure you are practising resignation?" Margaret's heart was full. She put her arm within her uncle's, and they turned again in the walk.

"You will think it folly at first," she said; "I know that well: but this is not a sudden notion. In my own mind I resolved, many weeks ago, that I would do every thing for George to the utmost extent in my power; and this came into my head. It seemed then visionary, and I still had hope of Mr. Dampier; but now you see there is nothing left: and it would be wise even in a worldly point of view. If George were to take orders, Philip would be provided for; but if not, we still have Philip to educate, and settle in the world: and how is this to be managed?"

"But, Margaret, my child, you have not considered,—a hundred a year is a large sum for a governess,—a very small one for a man at college. George could hardly live upon it."

"I am aware of that; but we might ourselves add a little, and I thought that you ——"

"Yes, in such a case as that, I would certainly do something; but even then it would be a very difficult matter."

"George would debar himself from common comforts; he would make any sacrifice rather than give up his great hope; and remember his talents. Oh, if it might only be!" Margaret clasped her hands entreatingly.

The tone of Mr. Sutherland's reply was less firm than usual. — "God bless you, my love, for your wish, and give you strength to carry it through if it should be right! But we must think upon all things; specially upon your mother."

"Poor mamma is overwhelmed already," said Margaret, despondingly; "one blow more can scarcely now be felt."

"You have not calculated upon a mother's pride, Margaret."

"But to save George! to provide for Philip!"

"They are great inducements — yet I fear. And are you not too sanguine? Who would give you so large a sum?"

Margaret mentioned the names of two persons of rank and fortune, with whom she knew that this was the accustomed salary for a governess.

"But they may not want to have you, Margaret."

"There may be others besides them, and I have the summer before me to try. I have but one doubt, — my own qualifications."

Mr. Sutherland became extremely grave, and said he would think upon the subject. It was on no account to be decided upon hastily, or even to be named to her mother.

"You are afraid of me," observed Margaret.

He hesitated for a moment, and then replied

freely, "I confess I am afraid. Your mind is not yet fitted to guide others."

"I have given up all," said Margaret, sorrowfully: "yes," she repeated, "all: that which was dear to me as my own life."

"But have you forgotten? — are you firm?"

"Forgotten! no, never. Who could or would forget? Yet I pray daily to be strengthened."

Mr. Sutherland's countenance expressed but partial satisfaction, and Margaret was very uneasy. "I must be left to think by myself, my love," said her uncle, gently withdrawing himself from her; and Margaret, though full of eagerness, acknowledged that he was right in giving the idea careful consideration.

CHAPTER XXX.

LATE in the evening Margaret sat alone in the garden. The weather was intensely sultry; a scorching mist spread itself over the sky, and not a leaf on the trees, nor a blade of grass, stirred beneath a passing breeze. The unnatural calm seemed the precursor of some great change, and Margaret saw in it the type of her own life; the momentary quiet which she was then bearing, rather than enjoying, and the troubles and responsibilities which were threatening the future. Following her uncle's injunctions, she had not named her wishes to her mother; but Mrs. Percival had heard the results of the appeal to Mr. Dampier, and full of disappointment, and with a will but partially chastened to resignation, had spent an hour in discussing with Margaret and Agatha the most unfeasible projects for retaining George at college. Mrs. Percival was more ambitious of distinction than of wealth; and she had lately settled it as nearly certain that Mr. Dampier would enter into her views, pity her forlorn situation, and, after perhaps a little delay, undertake the expenses of George's college life, and put Philip into the merchant's office. Affliction had not rendered her less sanguine, and whenever it was proposed to her to listen to business, she postponed the subject by saying that it was useless to do any thing until Mr. Dampier had given his definite answer about the boys. If Mr. Sutherland warned her against expecting too much, a burst of grief followed, and, as Margaret told Miss Debrett, the

family arrangements from this cause had remained in uncertainty. Poor Mrs. Percival was destined to disappointment in every case where she had rested her heart. Agatha's marriage had brought misery, and, in the eyes of many, disgrace; Dr. Percival's death, and Craven's extravagance, had put an end to all idea of her children being courted by the world; and now, the destruction of George's college prospects struck at the root of her last remaining hope. She felt the blow bitterly; but her grief was just such as to make Margaret see the greatest obstacles in the way of gaining her own object. The pride which was wounded for George would be equally wounded for her; and Margaret's spirit of endurance was sorely tried as she thought of the difficulties which lay in her path. In some seasons of affliction, self-sacrifice is the only comfort which seems left us. It becomes a pleasure, the greater from its magnitude; and Margaret, when thinking of the new course of life which she had chalked out for herself, found satisfaction in imagining its hardships; for they were to be borne, not for herself but her brother. In a fit of melancholy enthusiasm she longed to enter upon her duties at once, and she could herself see no objections that were not to be easily overruled. Her mother would go to Alton; Agatha would be her companion; and the education of the children would be an interest in Mrs. Percival's new and desolate life. With Mr. Sutherland constantly near them, they would be in safe hands. All seemed ordered well, except her mother's possible objections, and her uncle's doubts. Margaret could not view the latter in the same light with Mr. Sutherland. If she banished all perplexing questions, studiously avoided Romish books, and undertook to teach only according to the teaching of the English

Church, it seemed that no harm could possibly arise. She could not say that her mind was clear; that there were not moments — hours even — when religion seemed a chaos; but these moments were of less frequent recurrence, and she could almost invariably trace them to some remembrance of the Countess Novera.

When the intense wish arose to see Beatrice, to hear from her, at least to have the mystery of her silence cleared up, then all that had been connected with her came again to view. Margaret no longer strove to forget. She revisited in imagination the scenes which she had known with her; stood once more in the church of St. Ouen; wandered through the park at Henningsley; lingered upon the terrace; sat by the Countess reading or conversing; or, dwelling upon the event which had the most impressed her with awe, watched over the dying bed of Rhoda Newbolt; and, in the stillness of the hours which followed, received the Countess's first open acknowledgment of her affection; and insensibly from such recollections slided into others more dangerous to her peace of mind, and the stability of her religious faith. It was uncertainty which mainly contributed to foster Margaret's regret, and with it her doubts. If the separation had been mutually declared final, she would have striven more earnestly to regulate her mind; but now the idea was for ever haunting her that some further explanation was at hand; that the Countess must expect to see her again; that she would insist upon doing so, when she returned to Henningsley; and with this hope her affection was unconsciously fed. That same day, twelve months before, had been passed at Henningsley. Margaret remembered it particularly from a severe remark of Father Andrea's upon some glaring instance of political interference

in the English Church, which she had noted down at the time. In the course of the afternoon, in looking over some papers, she had met with it, and now it came again to her recollection, as associated with Mr. Sutherland's fears of the state of her mind, and her own inward consciousness that the volcano of doubt was not extinguished, though it slumbered.

The still evening was unbroken by any of the usual sounds of a large family. The children were gone out with Mr. Sutherland; and George and Agatha had persuaded her mother to take a drive. It was a sad request, for it was prefaced with —

"It is as well to take advantage of the opportunity whilst we have it."

Margaret preferred solitude: it was not often that she could enjoy it, and there were many things to be planned, for which she had in general but little leisure; yet her thoughts involuntarily wandered from all. She had lost the power of fixing her attention, and only the memories of her childhood, or the recollections of past happiness, had the power to chain her ideas for more than a few moments. She remained a long time lost in a quiet dreaming reverie; but it was disturbed at last. The glass door by which the garden was entered from the house was opened, and two persons appeared. One was a servant, — the other Margaret did not see very clearly. It was a man dressed in black, who followed close behind. Margaret rose, not liking to be interrupted, and annoyed at the liberty which had been taken; but the servant approached as if seeking her, and Margaret looked more narrowly. It seemed impossible that she could see correctly, but the servant moved aside, and with an extended hand, and a countenance in which sternness had given place to cordial sympathy and pleasure, Father Andrea came forward to greet

her. Margaret's first blush of surprise and delight told the welcome which her words could not express, for the bitterness of all that she had suffered since they parted came with a sudden rush to her heart, and she burst into tears. Father Andrea waited in silence, until she had recovered herself, and then said: "I was afraid I might see you thus. I felt that it might be intruding; but I was at Hennings-ley for one night, and I could not resist the temptation of inquiring for you, and when I heard you were here and alone, I hoped I might venture to come to you. Will you pardon me?"

Margaret smiled through her tears, as she replied, "It was pleasure as well as grief. I have so longed to hear of you and of Beatrice."

A restraint of manner followed this expression of feeling, and the confessor noticed it instantly.

"I can tell you but little of the Countess Novera," he replied. "I have not seen her for several weeks; business has detained me from her, and our correspondence has not been frequent. She has been ill, and is better; but this you know, probably, as well as I do."

"I know nothing," answered Margaret, sadly.

She paused, in hopes that the confessor would throw some further light upon the Countess's present situation; but Father Andrea looked vexed. There had been a reserve with regard to Margaret in the letters which he had received from Beatrice; but they were short, and of late had evidently been written in suffering. The Countess was impetuous, but not capricious, and he had imagined no cause for this beyond accidental circumstances.

"Nothing!" he said. "Yet I cannot wonder at it. Your time and thoughts must have been fully engrossed. But I trust you can give me some comfort to carry back to the Countess; that your

mother and your family are in some degree recovered?"

"It will be no comfort to her now," answered Margaret, "to hear of me in any way."

Father Andrea's face expressed his astonishment. "Your words are unintelligible," he said. "Surely, no misunderstanding—no fault—"

"Fault! no, not in her; I do not blame her, Father,"— at the word "Father," the Confessor's countenance lighted up with satisfaction—"it was my own doing." Margaret sat down on a bench near, and averted her face from his scrutinizing glance.

"Is this a mystery which I may be allowed to unravel, my daughter?" Margaret raised her eyes, and, as they met the confessor's, the powerful influence of his commanding spirit revived, and Mr. Sutherland's warnings were disregarded.

"I have given her up," she exclaimed, bitterly: "we have parted to meet no more. God forgive me if I erred! I have brought misery on myself, and perhaps on her."

Father Andrea's rigid composure was, in spite of himself, shaken at this announcement; it was wholly unexpected. He had been disappointed in not having before brought Margaret to a state of decision; and many times, lately in the midst of pressing business, the question had harassed him, whether he was right in allowing weeks to pass by without further urging the subject of religion by letter, though he was prevented from doing so in conversation. But his principle from the beginning had been to follow rather than to lead; to answer whatever difficulties Margaret might propose, but not to force ideas for which perhaps she might not be prepared; and the rumour which had reached him of the family misfortunes, accounted for the sudden cessa-

tion of her inquiries. That some deeper cause than this was the foundation of her silence, was now evident.

"Given her up!" he repeated slowly.

"For the sake of religion — for my conscience, Father, I dare not—I must not see her again!"

A slight expression of satire rested upon Father Andrea's countenance. "Religion and conscience are serious words, my daughter. We should learn to understand them well before we act upon them."

"It is my sole prayer, my one most earnest desire," exclaimed Margaret. "May God vouchsafe one day to open my eyes clearly to the truth!"

"Amen!" said the confessor, solemnly. He waited in expectation that Margaret would continue speaking; but finding that she remained silent he added: "Is it impertinent to wish for a more full explanation?"

"I will tell you all," said Margaret, seizing readily upon the prospect of relieving her burdened mind; and rapidly, yet very distinctly, she repeated to him the substance of her conversation with Mr. Sutherland, and the resolution which she had taken in consequence; saying, as she concluded: "I can trust that I have acted rightly; but Beatrice has doubtless judged differently. When last we parted she desired a fuller confidence than I had given as to the affairs of my family; and when I would have told her all, the opportunity was denied me. My unhappy letter must, in some way unknown to myself, have added to her displeasure. Father, will you intercede for me? My peace of mind is in your hands."

"Rather, in the hands of God, my daughter. These earthly cares can be of little weight while the great interests of the soul are at stake."

"You think me wrong; you condemn me," said Margaret.

"I am an erring mortal; I would condemn no one. But may your pardon be sealed before the last great day!"

Margaret trembled violently. "Father," she said, "I dare not talk to you longer; it is against the will and the advice of the best and wisest of earthly friends."

"And what if compliance with such advice were against the will of God?" His tone was solemn, and his eye searching.

"You would judge mercifully if you knew all," said Margaret, in anguish: "it is a horrible ordeal through which I have passed, and it may not yet be over. But I must act. Now, if I had the power, I have no time to think. A change has passed over my family which has entirely altered their prospects, and my thoughts must be given to them."

"And you must leave your home?"

"My home, my friends, all may probably be different; but if peace is at my heart, I can be thankful for every trial."

"And they say, 'Peace, peace, where there is no peace,'" repeated the confessor in an under-tone. Margaret rose from her seat very much agitated, and stood as if desiring that he should go; but his eyes were riveted upon the ground, and he did not notice her movements. "And you have not heard since from the Countess?" he inquired, suddenly looking up.

"Neither by message nor letter. It seems that I could not thus have treated her."

"And you parted in anger?"

"No, not in anger, but misunderstanding. It

was my own folly which caused me to practise a reserve; but it should not have continued."

Father Andrea betrayed an unusual embarrassment of manner, as he said quietly, "that which interests the Countess Novera interests me also."

"If you would hear," replied Margaret, with eagerness; "if you would carry back to Beatrice the full particulars of all my past and present difficulties, my mind would be relieved from a heavy burden. I should feel that she understood me, and I could rest satisfied in the possession of her love and her esteem."

"Neither could ever have failed you, my daughter, believe me; but, if I might, I would hear all that you can tell."

Margaret sat down again, and striving to forget the severe gravity of the Romish priest, and to fancy herself alone with Beatrice, narrated the circumstances which she believed had not been made satisfactorily clear to the Countess. She mentioned Agatha, and the hope which she now sometimes entertained of an ultimate reconciliation with her husband, through the interference of Mrs. St. Aubyn. "It was not a subject," she said, "upon which she would have troubled Father Andrea; but it had taken a singularly firm hold of the Countess's attention, and it would, she hoped, be satisfactory to her to hear it." The confessor's face softened in its expression as Margaret grew more unreserved; he showed an interest in her communications not for Beatrice alone, but for himself; and Margaret insensibly was led on to still greater freedom. She had seemed to herself lonely and unprotected before, thrown, as it were, upon the world to struggle for her family; but now, as she pronounced the word "Father," her heart clung to the associations connected with the name, and almost she could

have believed herself conversing with one, to whom relationship as well as reverence had bound her. When at length she spoke of her own great loss and her future plans, Father Andrea's manner became winning in its tenderness and sympathy. The object which she had now at heart was one in which principle would have forbidden him to co-operate. He could not assist, even if it had been in his power, in the education of a minister of a different communion; but he did not refer to this difference in the questions which he put to Margaret; and before the simple story of her trials was ended, he was in possession of her most cherished wishes, as well as of her secret fears. At length, when all was told, Margaret became aware how completely she had been thrown off her guard; how unlike her conversation had been to that which she would previously have supposed it possible to hold with Father Andrea. Had Mr. Sutherland been in his place she could scarcely have been more unreserved. She repented; but it was too late to recede. Father Andrea had gained his point, and was now acquainted with all the difficulties and temptations through which he might hope to renew and retain in spite of herself, his influence over her.

"The Countess Novera can have heard little indeed," he said, "if she has any feelings for you but those of respect and affection. There must have been some great misapprehension of your meaning."

"I was very miserable when I wrote to her," answered Margaret; "and I cannot answer for my words. I have tried to remember them, but I may mistake. One thing she could not have doubted—my love."

"And this letter was never named to me," said the confessor, rather speaking to himself, than to his companion.

"Then she has utterly cast me off," continued Margaret. "But I have no right to murmur; I could not have continued a correspondence."

"There must be a mistake; the Countess could not act so," said the confessor, in the same musing tone. In a louder voice, he added: "you are sure your letter was safely delivered?"

"Quite sure. I gave the order myself, and heard that it was executed."

"I have known cases of great forgetfulness at Henningsley," said Father Andrea.

"The fault, if fault there is, cannot lie there," replied Margaret. "The Signorina Fontana received the letter from my messenger, and promised to deliver it. No, it is too certain that Beatrice has received it." Margaret's manner was quite calm, for she had hope now, that through the medium of Father Andrea any misapprehension of her conduct on the part of the Countess would be removed. The confessor, on the contrary, was evidently more than ever perplexed. Uneasy thoughts seemed arising which he was wishing to conceal. He mentioned Lucia's name, and directly afterwards, as if not venturing to own what was in his mind, said hastily: "Was it your own servant who went?"

"Yes, one we can thoroughly trust. But you are disturbing yourself needlessly, Father."

"I would see him," said the confessor, not regarding the observation.

"If you will, certainly; but the case is extremely simple. You must remember we parted with something of distrust; at least I am sure it was so with Beatrice."

"The Countess Novera is not fickle," said the confessor, resuming the severity of manner which was natural to him; "and the interests at stake

were not earthly interests. I would inquire into this business myself, if possible."

Margaret left him immediately, for she stood too much in awe of him to remonstrate; and whilst she went to summon the man-servant, Father Andrea brooded over the painful suspicion which had arisen in his mind. The Countess's conduct appeared to him inexplicable, if she had really received the confession which Margaret had just made to him. The hope of so many months to be at once destroyed, and without a struggle,—no mention of the subject to him who was so interested in it. It could not be. But the letter had been sent and delivered to Lucia —there came the surmise which caused the frown on Father Andrea's brow. Lucia's jealous temper might urge her to any act by which she could hope to diminish the Countess's affection for Margaret. The letter might have been kept back. Father Andrea rejected the idea when first it presented itself; but it seemed less unreasonable on further consideration. At any rate he would inquire: if he did her injustice, the injustice was confined to his own breast; and he would then at once seek the Countess and represent to her the cruelty and caprice of which she had been guilty; and the sin, for to him it seemed no less, of casting away the prospect of Margaret's conversion, without giving him the opportunity of making one more effort for it. But Father Andrea's meditations were not allowed to continue unbroken. Children's tones were heard in the house; a merry laugh in the hall, the door of which was open; and then a single voice speaking authoritatively. Father Andrea saw two or three little figures pass up a winding staircase, and before he could determine whether to wait where he then was until Margaret came back, or to

return alone and apologise for his intrusion, Mr. Sutherland entered the garden alone. His dress and manner could not be mistaken. Father Andrea was certain who it must be. The impulse of a gentleman made him step forward instantly to offer his excuses and explanations; but Mr. Sutherland's start, almost of horror, as he drew near, brought the remembrance of the unpleasant light in which his presence there must be regarded.

"I would apologise," he said, lifting his hat from his head with the most dignified courtesy, "for an intrusion which must appear unaccountable; but as Miss Percival's friend, and the friend of the Countess Novera, I have been admitted to a short interview."

Mr. Sutherland's bow was coldly distant. Pain, surprise, and indignation were struggling in his breast. "I believe I have the honour of speaking to the Countess Novera's confessor," he said, evading any allusion to Margaret. "I was not aware that any of her family were now in this neighbourhood."

"For one night only. I hope to be in London to-morrow, and I could not resist the wish of carrying back my own report of Miss Percival and the family."

"My sister and my niece are much indebted to the Countess for her inquiries."

Even Father Andrea's ready tact failed him at this moment, and he knew not how to continue the awkward conversation. Mr. Sutherland expressed some regret that the confessor should be kept waiting. "Margaret was probably detained in the house; he would send for her."

"On no account; Father Andrea was in no haste; he had seen Miss Percival, and expected her to return. If Mr. Sutherland would permit him,

he could wait with perfect patience. He only feared that he might be intruding."

This, it was hoped, might be taken as a suggestion for Mr. Sutherland to go; but no earthly power would have induced Mr. Sutherland at that instant to leave Margaret within reach of a further private interview with the Romish priest. Father Andrea recovered his ease of manner, and conversed for some minutes readily upon the light topics of the day. His words flowed smoothly, sometimes eloquently, and the union of satire, earnestness, and deep thought, which his observations betrayed, alarmed Mr. Sutherland. No wonder that such a mind had gained an influence over Margaret; and now, how long had they been together? He looked round repeatedly, wondering why Margaret did not return; but Father Andrea appeared regardless of the time; and when at length Margaret came towards him, but without the servant, he continued talking with an air of complete unconcern. Margaret and Mr. Sutherland looked at each other for a moment. Fear and anxiety were depicted on the countenance of the former; but ingenuousness was there also. Whether the interview with Father Andrea had afforded her pleasure or pain, it was evidently not of her seeking.

"You have not brought your witness," said Father Andrea, lightly, noticing Margaret's confusion, and anxious to relieve it. Then, turning to Mr. Sutherland, he explained, as if the subject were but a trifle, that there was some mystery about a lost letter which he hoped to have unravelled.

"The man was gone out," Margaret said; "it was very unfortunate."

"Less so perhaps than you think. If I may see him to-morrow before nine o'clock, it will do equally well."

He held out his hand to wish her good bye. Mr. Sutherland was indignant, for he was convinced that the confessor's manner was a mask. "The Countess Novera is not, I presume, about to return to Henningsley?" he said.

"Not yet: her plans are uncertain."

"Then, Margaret, you had better send a message, if you wish to do so. Your home will probably be changed before the Countess is again in this neighbourhood."

The coldness of Mr. Sutherland's words was little in accordance with his feelings. He could scarcely bear to look at Margaret, knowing all that she must be suffering. Margaret found it difficult to reply, and Father Andrea, in a tone of great compassion, said, "Miss Percival is fully aware that the Countess Novera will require no assurances of remembrance. She can never forget."

"Neither will my niece; but the events of life are wisely ordered, and we must submit to them."

Margaret's glance was reproachful; but Mr. Sutherland had purposely turned away his face. Father Andrea would willingly have given Margaret the hope of hearing the result of his inquiry concerning the letter, yet he did not dare. He saw that Mr. Sutherland was resolute in putting an end to every prospect of a continued intercourse; but he hoped to throw him off his guard by appearing to be indifferent. He again raised his hat from his head, and bowed politely; and the shake of the hand with which he took leave of Margaret was apparently that of a common acquaintance; but Margaret felt the warm pressure, and it went to her heart. He was standing at the garden-gate. and Mr. Sutherland had walked away when she was tempted to indulge in one more parting word, and followed him. Mr.

Sutherland watched them; but they were together for a minute only; yet in that short time Father Andrea had found opportunity to say, "Daughter, it is written, 'Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.' Think of this, and pray that you may understand it."

CHAPTER XXXI.

MARGARET returned to her uncle, looked up in his face with an air of childlike candour and simplicity, and said:—"The meeting was as unexpected to me as to you."

"I was sure of it, Margaret; who would not trust you?"

"Yet it has given me pleasure, great pleasure," replied Margaret.

"Doubtless it has. For that reason I could find it in my heart to be thankful that it has been granted you."

"And you can perceive his goodness, his high intellect?"

"Yes, and your danger."

Mr. Sutherland looked very unhappy, and Margaret was too sincere to give him false comfort. She knew that Father Andrea's visit had rekindled the slumbering flame.

"Margaret," continued Mr. Sutherland, after a silence of some moments, "will you tell me all that passed between yourself and this Romish priest?"

Margaret had no hesitation in complying. If she had been incautious in her unreserve, yet conscience acquitted her of any thing beyond the impulse which a young girl would naturally feel to speak of her trials to one whom she highly reverenced. Mr. Sutherland listened with considerable anxiety while Margaret repeated all, even the con-

cluding words; and when she had ended, he said: "You think, of course, my dear Margaret, that all this is clear and simple, involving no hidden meaning?"

"Yes, certainly. A hidden meaning! you could not do Father Andrea such injustice as to suppose him capable of it."

"All hidden meanings are not sinful, Margaret. Father Andrea's meaning is, I am ready to believe, good; yet I would not trust you with him,—and he will see you again."

"I gave him no hope of it," replied Margaret.

"But you expressed pleasure at his coming; you told him the secret history of your family; and you would send no final message to the Countess, although I gave you the opportunity."

"I saw no necessity for it," answered Margaret; "and words failed me."

"Then what will you do if the temptation should occur again? and it will do so; neither the Countess nor the confessor will thus give you up."

Margaret's heart throbbed with pleasure; but a pang of self-reproach followed instantly.

"The path before you seems fair," continued Mr. Sutherland, in a tone of eager expostulation, very unlike his usual quietness; "there are few dangers to be seen, and you have confidence in your own stability of purpose; but at no moment of your life,—no, not even when you were in daily communication with Henningsley, were you ever more near the brink of the precipice."

"You think me weak," replied Margaret; "and I am weak, but not utterly unstable."

"My dear Margaret, you are unstable, because you do not see the evil against which you are to guard. Whilst Romanism is presented to you in the form in which it is exhibited by the Countess and her

confessor, you will never see it in its true light ; and until you have become a dutiful daughter of the English Church, in your heart as well as your actions, you will never comprehend the sin of forsaking her."

"It is true," said Margaret; "I am acting upon faith, — upon faith in your assurances."

"If I were to leave you, and Father Andrea were to be with you, you would learn to act upon his.— Have I not cause to fear?"—His tone of sorrow cut Margaret to the heart.

"I think you may depend upon me," she said ; "hitherto I have not disobeyed."

"But do you not see, Margaret, even from the few words which passed to-night, how they will try to work upon you? If any means of renewing the intercourse should be found, they will tamper with your conscience; and when conscience is perverted, there is scarcely any hope."

"We can have no surer guide," observed Margaret.

"Yet our Saviour himself says, 'the time cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.' Conscience is a safe guide when it tells us what we ought not to do; but it may err fatally when it would teach us what we are to do. Margaret, as you value your eternal salvation, I warn you against putting yourself again within reach of temptation."

Margaret was frightened, but she was not convinced. "I will not conceal from you," she said, "that I cannot view this subject as you do. I can so far agree with you that I think it better to remain where I now am, until I see more evident reasons to distrust the English Church. I hope and believe that I am safe; and, whatever it may cost me, I trust never again to place myself in the hands

of Romanists; but to say that I can look upon a change of religion from a conscientious principle as a great sin, is more than I can yet allow."

"Conscientious principle! There, Margaret, is the stumblingblock. Conscience is in each man's breast. A good man utters a hasty word, and his conscience accuses him bitterly. A bad man ruins his neighbour by slander, and his conscience is silent. Is there no law by which both shall be judged, except conscience?"

Margaret gave a silent assent.

"I would warn you earnestly, solemnly, upon this subject," continued Mr. Sutherland, his voice growing husky with agitation; "because conscience is the plea upon which the most fatal crimes have been committed. God has given to man an external revelation, a law of perfect holiness and truth; if our consciences agree with that law, we are safe; if they do not, the disagreement is in itself a sin for which we shall surely be called to account, according as we have had it in our power to learn the truth."

"But surely, surely," said Margaret, distressed at the contradiction between the opposite warnings of her uncle and the confessor,—"those who are ignorant as I am may hope for pardon if they err."

"We will consider," replied Mr. Sutherland; "and remember, I am dealing only with your individual case. Each person must be judged by himself. Whatever extenuations there may be for others, God must know, and must acquit or condemn in perfect wisdom."

"But for me?" said Margaret; "tell me why you speak so earnestly?"

Mr. Sutherland's countenance assumed an expression of deep awful thought. It seemed as if he almost feared to give utterance to that which

was in his mind; but as Margaret turned to him for an explanation of his silence, he said: "Margaret, we are accustomed to speak of the judgment which we must undergo, or, at least, to allude to it often, but I think we scarcely realise it. So I own it is with me. Lately, I have endeavoured to imagine the plea upon which a person in your circumstances leaving the English Church might attempt to justify himself before the tribunal of God. I have endeavoured to do so the more carefully," he added, "because I have felt that the hour might arrive when such a plea might be made by you." The last words were almost inaudible. "Think, Margaret," he said, recovering himself, "think of that time. There will be no power of false palliation then — nothing wilfully concealed; the secrets of our hearts will be open, and heaven or hell will be before us. When the question shall then be asked why you left the Church of your fathers, what will be your answer?"

"I could not leave it whilst I believed it to be a true Church," said Margaret, in a trembling voice.

"But we will imagine that you did believe it — that you had brought yourself to believe it; and you might then say, 'It is true that I was baptized into the English Church; I was taught that it was a branch of the Catholic Church; I was warned that to leave it would be schism; I was instructed in creeds, and catechisms, and articles of faith, all which I saw to be in accordance with the inspired Word of God. I heard that the English clergy derived their descent from the Apostles; and I knew, from my own experience, and from the undoubted testimony of others, that the prayers of the Church, her ordinances, festivals, and fasts, were, through the grace of God, able to build me up in a life of holiness. The more I assimilated myself

in spirit to the English Church, the more I approached the standard of perfection which the Bible held out. But this was not enough. The people of England were unmindful of their Church: they neglected her ordinances and despised her commands. The clergy preached different doctrines, and there was little uniformity in public worship. The state kept the Church in subjection, and no one raised a voice against it. Parishes were frequently neglected; sacraments were by many persons scarcely allowed to be a means of grace; discipline was a mere name: it seemed as if the Church must soon become extinct. Because other of her children were disobedient, I was disobedient likewise; because each followed that which was right in his own eyes, I too threw off the yoke. Instead of remaining where the providence of God had placed me, and endeavouring to carry out the principles of the Church in my own practice, I sought for that which pleased me better; and I examined into the claims of the communion of Rome.' Margaret, have I said one word which is not true?"

"No," replied Margaret, in a humble voice: "these are indeed the difficulties which have staggered me—which do often stagger me still."

"And because of these difficulties, do you think that conscience will justify you before God in breaking the unity of the Catholic Church, and being guilty of the sin of schism?"

"It could not, if the claims of Rome were not true," said Margaret.

"Then we will look at the other side. We will suppose that you are enumerating the inducements which Rome held out. You might say: 'There was in my country another Church professing to have a claim upon my allegiance. This claim rested upon

the supremacy of a foreign bishop: the claim, though of long standing, had been refuted continually, and I had no means of inquiring into it myself. I saw nothing about it in the Bible. Good and learned men declared that it had never been admitted by the primitive Church, but I would not listen to them. I admired the power and antiquity of this Church—I liked its magnificence—I was astonished at its energy—I was very weak and ignorant, and above all things needed guidance; yet I took upon myself to leave the teachers whom God had given me, and to choose new ones. The prayers suited my enthusiastic fancy, the solemn services were congenial to my taste. I knew that if the Bishop of Rome were not the head of the Church, all in England who obeyed him must be schismatics; yet I put the question aside. I had formed a theory in my own mind of what the Catholic Church ought to be, and because the Romish Church, as I saw it working immediately around me (though I was told it was very different elsewhere), approached more nearly to this theory than the English, therefore conscience told me I ought to join it.' Margaret, will that plea justify you?"

"You are inclined to be severe," said Margaret.

"I wish only to be just. In this instance justice must also be the greatest mercy. You can never know, Margaret, how I have loved you; and if affection could be a call upon you for caution, I would kneel to you to entreat that for my sake you would watch against the snares of Romanism; but there is one rock, and one only, on which to rest — external truth. Once more, as you value your eternal salvation, beware how you forsake it."

Margaret was touched by this appeal, and as Mr. Sutherland rose to return to the house, she said — "If I know myself, in any degree, you shall have no cause to fear."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Father Andrea had gained much by his interview with Margaret, but not all that he desired; for Mr. Sutherland's appearance had prevented him from again touching upon the question of religion. There would, he saw, be a considerable difficulty in keeping up the acquaintance under the present circumstances of the family; and it seemed doubtful whether, from the state of the Countess's health, the opportunity of personal intercourse would much longer be afforded him. But Father Andrea was a man of determined resolution; his heart was given to his Church, and his interest in Margaret was considerable. Now, more than ever, he resolved to win her at all hazards. Wherever he might be, in England or in Italy, he would still persevere, so long as the way seemed in the least degree open; and, as a first step, he would inquire into the cause of the Countess's estrangement. But little light was thrown upon the origin of her silence by the confessor's examination of the man-servant the next morning. The letter was declared to have been given to Lucia; and when the man turned to look back after leaving her, he said that he had perceived her standing under the tree with it in her hand: but this was nothing more than what Margaret had stated, and Father Andrea secretly blamed himself for being more inclined to suspect Lucia of dishonourable conduct, than to imagine that Beatrice

could be hasty or capricious. His journey to London was performed as speedily as possible; for it had been mentioned to him that Lucia intended to go with Lady Anstruther into Devonshire, and he was anxious to see her before she set off. The idea of having been partial, even in thought, was painful to him; yet, when they met, his affection for the Countess made him forget that he had been justifying her at Lucia's expense. He saw only that she was ill; and Lucia's evident embarrassment roused anew his latent suspicion. When the slight confusion attendant on the departure of Lady Anstruther was over, his look of disturbance was more plainly perceived by the Countess. He made a remark upon Lucia's absence; and refusing any offer of refreshment, began to inquire into the cause of her haste. 'Why had she not waited to see him, when she knew that he was intending immediately to return; and that he would have taken her himself into Devonshire on any day she might afterwards have named? It was not the arrangement which he had expected from her.' The Countess explained; but the explanation seemed only to increase the confessor's annoyance. He sat for some time in moody silence. The Countess took up some work; but she could not help watching him. His brows were closely knit, and there was a regular, yet impatient movement of his foot upon the floor, which was a sign of great discomposure. Once or twice Beatrice was upon the point of addressing him; but, much as she loved him, she was at all times afraid of intruding on his reveries. When at length the confessor broke silence suddenly, it was with another and a more anxious remark, upon the alteration in her appearance. "I can never think that England agrees with you, my daughter," he said.

"Neither do the physicians, father. If I had

listened to them, I should be on the eve of a journey now with Lady Anstruther."

"But you did not name this to me in your letters."

"Because I knew it would be impossible to set off so soon."

"I see no impossibility if it is necessary. You might go alone, and I would follow."

"Nay, father," said Beatrice, affectionately, "that must never be. It would make me miserable. You have been absent already too long; and I have so few to love me now."

The shade of sorrow which rested on the Countess's pale features deepened as she spoke; and Father Andrea grew impatient at the mutual reserve. Yet he did not venture to introduce Margaret's name abruptly. Beatrice was so thin, her eye so bright, her transparent cheek so hectic in its hue, he saw that excitement of any kind must be injurious. "I should have been here yesterday," he remarked, putting on an air of unconcern, "but I was induced to make a circuit in my journey. I slept one night at Henningsley."

"Henningsley!" The Countess smiled for an instant; then relapsed into melancholy, and said no more.

"Yes, I thought it uncertain how long we might be detained in town, and, as I had the opportunity, it seemed unwise not to take advantage of it. I found all things going on well. The school-house is progressing, and the people are pleased. I saw none of your friends — except"— he looked at her fixedly, and added, — "Miss Percival."

Beatrice started, and the work fell from her hands.

"I had a long conversation with her, my daughter."

"With her ! Margaret herself ! but it can do me no good."

She tried to appear perfectly calm ; but the confessor was not deceived.

"We will not practise concealment with each other any longer," he said, with more of severity than before ; "there has been too much already. It was neither good for yourself, nor kind to Miss Percival, to keep from me the knowledge of your separation."

"Forgive me, father," said the Countess in a tone of meek wretchedness, "I could not bear to weary you with my disappointment, and you could not help me. I trusted unwisely, and I have been taught my error. It is the common fate of human friendship."

"My daughter, in trusting to Miss Percival, you trusted to one who is pure, and upright, and devoted in her affection. In casting her off, you have given up as fair a hope of winning a soul to God as ever has been granted to a mortal being."

The Countess grew very pale ; it seemed that a sudden light had dawned upon her. "Father," she said, "in that respect I may have erred. Yet, I had reason to think that Margaret was not earnestly seeking after truth ; and I can scarcely tell how I could have acted differently. It was she who withdrew herself from me ; who became suddenly constrained ; wrote to me coldly ; suffered me to depart without one word of kindness ; and has never since addressed to me a single explanation. The De Lisles may be proud ; but surely their daughter cannot be blamed, if, in such a case, she owns herself indignant ?"

"And the letter, the confession of misery, the acknowledgment that for conscience' sake she must give up all she loved ?"

The Countess looked at him wildly. "The letter — the confession — Oh, Margaret!"

Bewildering fears took possession of her mind: suspicion that she had herself been unjust; a momentary horror lest Margaret had been untrue in her interview with Father Andrea; and a consciousness that, under whatever provocation, she had acted unjustifiably in sacrificing the prospect of her conversion, by not informing the confessor of all that had passed.

"You speak enigmas," she added.

"The events of life must ever be enigmas to those who ruin their own happiness by wilfulness and impetuosity," said Father Andrea. "Before I explain myself farther, I would hear the circumstances which have led to this fatal separation."

The Countess's proud spirit for a moment rebelled against the command; but her habitual submission to the confessor prevailed. "You are angry with me, father," she said: "it may be justly; but you shall know all."

Father Andrea bent his head in assent, but made no observation; whilst Beatrice narrated from the commencement the story of Lucia's jealous fancies; her own struggles against the insinuations; her doubts of Margaret, and the symptoms which had tended to confirm them; and, at length, the unintentional test to which she had subjected her, and the unaccountable change of manner which had followed.

"These things may appear trifles to you, father," she said; — "mere suspicions; but how could I do otherwise than I have done? How could I write to Margaret freely, when in my heart I doubted her sincerity? My fingers would have refused to act. I could not have penned the deceitful words; neither could I confess my distrust. If it were un-

founded, it would have served only to separate us more decidedly; for she would have deemed me fanciful and weak-minded. If it were correct, her excuses would have exasperated me. I had but one course to take—silence. Margaret might have written, and she did not."

The Countess ended, and leant her head upon the pillow, faint from excitement and exertion. Father Andrea was frightened, and would have postponed any further conversation; but she insisted upon continuing it.

"Nothing will do me good till I have heard what you can tell me," she said. "Prove to me that Margaret is true. But you cannot," she added, seeing that the confessor delayed answering.

"My daughter, such proof in words only may be unavailing. Had you seen Miss Percival, as I did yesterday, bowed down by sorrow for the loss of her father ——"

"Her father! — Dr. Percival dead!" interrupted the Countess, making an effort to rise.

Father Andrea laid his hand upon her, to force her to be still. "Dr. Percival is dead, my daughter. His family are in distress; not only of mind, but from pecuniary embarrassments. They are about to leave their house, and Miss Percival is intending to give up the comforts of her family, and offer herself as a governess, that she may find the means of providing for her brother's college education. In the midst of these many trials there is one peculiarly her own—that you have cast her off; that you parted from her without confessing the causes of your secret annoyance; and that, when, upon the positive commands of her uncle, a minister of the Establishment, she wrote to you in great distress of mind, to say that she dared not risk a continued intercourse with you, lest she should be

converted to the faith of our Holy Church, you acquiesced without one word of commiseration. Miss Percival, my daughter, blames herself for reserve; your own conscience will tell you where the blame really rests."

The Countess had listened to this explanation without the least sign of agitation, except the quivering of her lips. When the confessor ceased speaking, she gently motioned to him with her hand to ring the bell; but her voice was inarticulate. Father Andrea reproached himself severely for his incautiousness: the communication had been made too suddenly and startling. He stood, looking in silence at the marble features of the unhappy Countess, until Lauretta appeared; and then Beatrice, although with great effort, whispered —

"Father, you will believe me; that letter never reached me."

"My daughter, I knew, I was certain of it; but we will speak more of it by and by;" and bidding Lauretta summon him when her mistress should wish to see him again, Father Andrea departed to seek for the truth from Lucia.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The suggestion offered itself to Lucia, when, for a moment, she feared that Father Andrea might be suspicious of the truth, to deny having any knowledge of Margaret's letter; but this was directly seen to be dangerous: for she might be convicted of having received it by the testimony of the servant. Lucia was now not only horror-struck at the prospect of the exposure of her guilt, but humiliated by the recollection of it. She fancied herself penitent, though she was not so; for she would still, if she could, have gratified her jealousy; but she had been betrayed into a mean, contemptible action, and her self-respect was lessened. We are all liable to this error, imagining that we are grieved at a fault, when we are only grieved at having done something to lower ourselves in our own estimation. Real penitence admits no lingering of sin; it searches into the secret recesses of the heart; humbles itself in solitude before God; and is thankful even whilst distressed, at the prospect of censure. Still Lucia could not really believe that Father Andrea had obtained a clue to her secret; and when she was summoned to his presence, she strove to rally her failing courage by supposing that he merely wished to learn some particulars of the Countess's illness. Father Andrea began by these inquiries, and Lucia was thrown off her guard. She told him all that had been lately passing, and in her extreme

desire to know when she might consider herself safe, hinted a wish to follow Lady Anstruther the next day, if convenient. The confessor did not immediately reply. Lucia watched him; but saw nothing alarming. After a few moments, however, he said, without noticing her inquiry —

"I was at Henningsley yesterday."

In spite of herself, Lucia felt her countenance changing; but the confessor was not looking at her, and she recovered. Yet her answer was short — "I am glad of that for the Countess's sake."

"I was at Henningsley," again repeated Father Andrea.

This time he looked up, and Lucia's colour went and came very quickly. She tried to turn the conversation by another allusion to Lady Anstruther; but Father Andrea was not a person to be diverted from his object. His eye rested upon her, and he added, "I saw Miss Percival."

Lucia stood motionless; but she was not practised in deception; and when she said, "I hope you found her well," her voice shook.

Father Andrea, as before, made no direct comment or reply; but went on again — "I had a conversation with her of some length."

Lucia could scarcely support this torture. Father Andrea was always direct, often abrupt, in his conversation. He was particularly so now; yet it might be only manner. The confessor made a few observations upon the melancholy state of the family, and the necessity of their removal from the Grove. Lucia tried to enter into the subject, and succeeded tolerably well; but Father Andrea saw through her efforts, and just as she had expressed peculiar regret at Margaret's trials, he said very quietly, and as if in continuation of the topic —

"Miss Percival sent a letter to the Countess

before she went away, which you took; what did you do with it?"

The tone was so entirely unconcerned, that Lucia could not in the least comprehend it. The temptation to deceive, if possible, was more than she could withstand. "I don't remember — I forget."

The confessor's indignation burst all bounds; he started from his seat, and his eyes flashed. "Daughter," he said, "I have borne with you too long. If you have sinned in this matter, you will do wisely to confess it."

The stillness which followed was awful to Lucia. The possible chances of escape, by persisting in denial, presented themselves instantaneously to her mind; but they were rejected. She sunk on her knees before him; but Father Andrea bade her instantly rise.

"Kneel not to me, my daughter; kneeling is the attitude of a penitent. Let me hear the truth."

Lucia drew herself up proudly. Shame was mingled with hatred of Margaret, and anger at the discovery. "Reject me, father," she exclaimed, "if you will; and blame me. I have sinned; but I am not without excuse. I was scorned — neglected — supplanted; and I turned to revenge myself on the adder that stung me. Who would not have done the same?"

The confessor did not attempt to interrupt her. He stood in a patient, listening attitude, and she went on — "You have told me oftentimes, father, that I was jealous. The Countess Novera told me the same. You warned me, and advised me; and then you placed me in the way of temptation. In my own country I was near to the Countess's heart. I was cherished as her child; no one whispered to me that the time could ever come when it should be otherwise. She was my delight, my idol. I would have sacrificed life for her, and thought it

happiness. She came to England: there is no need to remind you of what has passed. You well know how, day by day, I have marked the ebbing of the love which was my all. You have yourself aided in the work which has transferred the Countess's affection from me, a friendless orphan, a true daughter of the Church, to a mercenary protestant heretic. But you cannot know the causes which have brought me to despise her. If she had been worthy of the Countess, I would have buried my grief in my own breast, and they should have been happy in my absence. I would have returned to Italy, and left them to the full enjoyment of their friendship. But I was certain that the Countess was deceived, and that when I was gone she would discover her error, and I strove to open her eyes. She was wilfully blind, and when I placed the facts before her, she would not heed them. At length I saw reason to hope that she was awakening from her vain dream. She parted from Miss Percival with some suspicion of her sincerity. This I knew from her manner. We were about to leave Henningsley, and accident threw in my way a letter which I knew must contain a tissue of apologies and deceptions. Father, I have no wish to exculpate myself. I erred; in your eyes it may be grievously. An intense desire seized me to know the contents of the letter; when it was given into my hands, I opened it."

Father Andrea turned from her, and ejaculated in a low voice, "Base!"

Lucia caught the words. "No, father, never. I am not base. At the moment when I committed the act I was humbled to the dust at my weakness; but I was desperate. They only who have felt my provocation can judge of my sin."

"And the letter — what became of it?"

Lucia smiled scornfully. "It is gone," she ex-

claimed. "Scattered to the winds." She paused; but there was no interruption, and she proceeded — "Was it likely that I should confess my fault? I did Miss Percival no harm. She said that they must separate, and they did. I saved the Countess from the temptation of again throwing herself into her snares. The letter was like Miss Percival's every action, plausible and hypocritical. If the Countess had seen it, she would have delayed her journey; they would have met; and her first partiality would have returned."

"And the soul of a heretic might have been saved;" and Father Andrea groaned aloud.

"You are sanguine, father," said Lucia, who in her eager self-justification had overlooked the point which would naturally take the greatest hold of the confessor's mind. "If you had heard and seen what I have, you might be less hopeful of Miss Percival."

Father Andrea laid a powerful hand upon her shoulder. "Miss Percival's name does not again pass your lips. Speak of yourself, your own miserable guilty self. Tell me if you have confessed all, and then leave me, that I may pray that God would vouchsafe to give you another heart."

He motioned her from his presence; but Lucia once more knelt before him, —

"Father, I have confessed all. I have kept nothing back. I am willing to do penance, and I seek for absolution."

The confessor looked at her for an instant in anger, but it melted into sorrow, —

"Unhappy girl!" he said, "is this the hope upon which you have built? Remember that the confession which is extorted by necessity can never be the confession of repentance. You will keep your chamber until your further movements are decided upon."

Lucia heard his words, and remained riveted to the spot. To be refused absolution! it seemed too horrible. But Father Andrea repeated his command, and she rose mechanically, and obeyed him.

Father Andrea remained buried in thought. His conscience was troubled. Lucia had been jealous, wilful, carried away by the strength of temptation; she was guilty: but was he himself innocent? Was the accusation of having placed a snare in her path, by assisting to transfer the Countess's affection to another, utterly false? Father Andrea could not say that it was. In his anxiety to win a convert to his Church, he had been too unmindful of the responsibility he had already incurred. Lucia had been exasperated, when she might have been soothed; and, though her offence could not thus be excused, the confessor's sincerity of conscience made him feel as if he himself must, in a measure, share it. But if the past were irremediable, the future he resolved should never rise up in judgment against him for neglect. The Countess and Lucia must instantly part: there was clearly no alternative; yet Lucia must not be cast off. Until she was restored to her own country, and placed under the care of those who were competent to guide her, the confessor saw that he must still be answerable for her. But in this case, what was to be done? The short interview with the Countess had opened his eyes to the true state of her health. He saw that she was very ill,—far worse than he had anticipated. Immediate change had been recommended for her; and change he was resolved she should have. Under these circumstances, Margaret must be given up. The pang which accompanied the thought was not slight. The lofty-minded, reserved Romish priest, absorbed in his spiritual duties, and living only for his Church, had yet been attracted

by Margaret's simplicity, delicacy, and enthusiasm, in no ordinary degree. He could not regard her in the same light as he did the Countess; but his interest in her was inferior to nothing else. Her conversion was the hope which had for months been nearest to his heart, and to sacrifice it was, in his eyes, to sacrifice her everlasting happiness. The truth had been set before her, and she had owned herself all but convinced. Ignorance, therefore, could not now be her excuse. For more than an hour Father Andrea pondered upon these conflicting claims of duty, — forming schemes for harmonising them, striving to determine which should be relinquished, and occasionally tracing back the chain of events that had conducted him to the present moment, and seeking to discover where and how he had erred, either ignorantly or sinfully.

Upon one point he could in no way satisfy himself. He had often neglected to press the subject of religion upon Margaret, because it appeared more prudent; but there might have been lukewarmness in the delay; and from henceforth, in punishment of his error, the opportunity which he so fervently desired would probably be denied him. He might write to her; but he could not expect such rare communications to have the influence of personal intercourse, even though Margaret were willing to keep them up. If she could be with the Countess in Italy, the fascination of its historical associations and the pomp of its southern worship, aided by the charms of a delicious climate and lovely scenery, would seem to render the result secure. Difficulties, apparently insurmountable, lay in the way; — the uncomfortable position of Margaret's family, the state of the Countess's health, the certain interposition of Mr. Sutherland; — yet Father Andrea's determination made him see possibilities where

others would have ridiculed the passing idea. "In the work of the salvation of an immortal soul," — such was his thought — "no difficulties should be permitted to be insurmountable."

Whilst still brooding upon the subject he was summoned to the Countess.

Beatrice was lying in the same position as when he had left her. Her eyes were closed, her long thin fingers clasped together, and the dark braided hair which shaded her colourless cheek, marking with an unnatural contrast the outline of her fair pure features. Father Andrea, on his entrance, gazed at her in awe. But for the scarcely perceptible breathing, he could have believed that the charge which had been entrusted to him was at an end, — that the spirit, over which he had so anxiously watched, had found its home of rest. But the Countess moved, opened her eyes, and smiled. The bright glance lit up her face, as the sunlight sparkles on the treacherous wave, and the death which lay waiting beneath was, for an instant, hidden from view.

"I am better, father, much better," she said; "I have slept, — and sleep is so great a blessing."

"The greatest of earthly blessings in sickness and sorrow of heart, my daughter. God make us thankful for it!"

"And for all other mercies!" added the Countess. "Mine have been very great." Then, exerting herself to speak more lightly, she continued, — "I can hear now all that you can tell me. I would know every thing concerning Margaret."

The confessor hesitated, and the Countess repeated her request with great urgency.

"You know me well, father. It is only a first shock which does me harm. Afterwards I can bear every thing, even self-reproach for injustice."

"My daughter, I could scarcely say that you were unjust. If appearances are ever safe guides, you can find many extenuations."

"Some," answered the Countess; "but the letter — surely you spoke of one? My head grew dizzy; yet I could not have been mistaken."

The confessor was perplexed by this direct question, for he had hoped to introduce the mention of Lucia's guilt by degrees.

"You are right," he replied; "I did speak of a letter. Miss Percival herself named it to me. It contained the result of a conversation with her uncle, in which he had persuaded her to relinquish your friendship lest it should be the means of leading her from the Protestant faith. Nay,"— he added, seeing that the Countess's face expressed anger as well as sorrow—"we must not allow ourselves to be uncharitable in this matter. There are members of the Establishment who are, apparently, as rooted in their belief as we are in ours. Mr. Sutherland may be one of this class; and in following him, Miss Percival is submitting to an authority which she naturally estimates highly."

"But at once! so easily to give up all!" exclaimed the Countess. "Lucia must have been right. She could never have been in earnest."

The confessor's face grew dark at the mention of Lucia.

"Daughter, you must trust me," he said, "I have reason to judge truly in this case. Miss Percival may have yielded too soon to her uncle's advice; that we cannot decide until we know all that passed between them; but of her perfect sincerity I have no more doubt than I have of your own devotedness to the cause of the Church."

"Heaven grant that you may be right, father! If I am suspicious, it is from my love for her. I

would not have a shade to taint the perfection of her character."

"It has not been, and it cannot be touched, except by slander," said Father Andrea, emphatically.

The Countess was surprised at his tone, and looked up to inquire his meaning.

"Base, vile slander!" he added, in an under voice.

"You refer to Lucia," said the Countess. "But I have dreaded to be unfair to her in distrusting her."

"You will not be that," said the confessor. "The letter, which I mentioned, was given into her hands."

He could not bring himself to explain Lucia's conduct more clearly, and the Countess did not comprehend what he wished to infer.

"Into Lucia's hand! but how? when? what can you mean? Was it lost by her? Oh, why did she not confess?" The Countess raised herself, and her eye grew excited and impatient.

"Lucia has erred in this, my daughter. She has done you wrong from the beginning. Jealousy is the parent of many crimes."

"Jealousy! yes, I know it; but her words, father, she could not have been deceived, and the letter — in pity tell me—"

The agitation of the Countess's manner became so great, that Father Andrea saw he must not delay his answer.

"The letter was destroyed," he said, watching anxiously the effect of the disclosure. "It told a tale of misery which would have aroused your utmost sympathy. Lucia received, opened, read, and destroyed it."

The eyes of the unhappy Countess wandered

wildly around the room. "Lucia! Lucia!" she repeated.

She put her hand to her head; all things seemed bewildering. Lucia's guilt banished the recollection of Margaret's suffering. Father Andrea allowed the silence to last for some moments. He gave her some water, bathed her forehead with refreshing scent, and strove to prevent her from recurring immediately to the subject; but the Countess could not be satisfied until she knew more. Her generous, noble nature, could not at once realise the fact of Lucia's deception. Whilst the confessor gave the particulars of his interview with Margaret, the Countess's face assumed a more tranquil air. She was enjoying a relief from most painful doubts; but when he recounted the details of Lucia's confession, her pride, and stubbornness of spirit, she again became distressed. Father Andrea marked the quick pulsation in her neck, the rapid, irregular breathing; yet Beatrice sat upright, and when he had ended, she said in a firm, clear voice: —

"Father, I would speak with Lucia now."

"Now, my daughter! You overtask your strength."

"Now, it must be. I will care for her, provide for her; but after this day I can never see her again."

The confessor thought for a few moments. "Yes, it is best," he said; "henceforth she must be my care alone."

"And she may come to me," inquired the Countess, anxiously, "at once?" And in a low soft voice, she added, "Father, my time cannot be long. Let me forgive and pray, and die in peace."

Father Andrea was afraid of the consequence of expostulation, and the message was sent to Lucia.

The Countess sat immoveable, her eyes fixed upon the door; whilst the confessor walked up and down the room watching the sad, yet firm expression of her countenance, and sometimes upon the point of insisting that the interview should be deferred. The five minutes which passed seemed to him doubled; but the Countess expressed no impatience; and when the confessor went himself to hasten Lucia, she scarcely noticed that he was gone. After a short delay he returned. Lucia slowly followed him—pride of heart struggling with the shame which bowed her to the earth. The Countess repeated her name kindly, and unfalteringly; and Lucia stood still, for the voice so dearly loved awoke the softer feelings of her heart. Again the Countess repeated —

"Lucia! my child!"

And then Lucia advanced, threw herself before her, and hiding her face in her lap, sobbed aloud. Beatrice bent over her, and strove to speak; but her words were scarcely audible: —

"Lucia," she said, "may God forgive, and bless you, and guard you when you are far away!"

Lucia looked up in her face, and throwing back her dark ringlets, exclaimed: "Hate me, and despise me, for love is worse than death."

"I will pray for you," said Beatrice, faintly. "I will pray that God may show you your sin; that He may give you repentance. Will you not pray also for yourself?"

Lucia rose suddenly. "Pray for myself!" and she cast a fearful glance at the confessor. "I! the castaway!"

"But to be restored by penitence, daughter," said Father Andrea, solemnly.

"Lucia, you will seek for mercy?" continued the Countess. "You will strive to gain the know-

ledge of your guilt? When we are parted — and parted we must now be, even in Italy — that alone will comfort me when I think of you."

In those few words Lucia read the extent of her punishment. "Parted we must now be, even in Italy!" The sentence admitted of no hope.

"The Countess is right, daughter," said Father Andrea. "After what has transpired, you can never expect to meet her except as a stranger."

A smothered scream fell upon the Countess's ear. Lucia sank into a chair.

"If now," continued the confessor, "you can in shame and repentance seek for pardon from a fellow mortal, the prayers of the Countess may call down mercy upon your guilty head. Refuse to humble yourself, and your heart will become hardened, it may be for ever, in its guilt."

The haughty blush of indignation mantled upon Lucia's dark brow. She turned to depart; but Beatrice in a tone of pitying anguish, murmured,—

"Lucia!"

And the proud Italian spirit was touched. For an instant she stood irresolute, and then the overflowing tide of disappointed affection and self-reproach burst forth. "Forgive me!" she exclaimed: "I will ask for forgiveness; for though I was rejected, it was sin to bring suffering upon you, who were born for love and happiness. Yet as I did then, so would I do now. If possible, I would save you from deception —"

Father Andrea held up his finger. "Daughter, there must be no allusion —"

"Yes," interrupted Lucia, "for the last time there must and shall be. The Countess Novera shall know that the unhappy girl whom she taught to live but for her, and then cast aside as unworthy of a thought, had no falsehood in her heart when

she said that Margaret Percival was untrue. The accusation was made deliberately, and it is repeated."

"Oh, Lucia!" said the Countess, "and is this repentance?"

Lucia's manner became more gentle. "Repentance for my sin against you, Signora; for from you I hope for pardon."

Beatrice turned away her head in sorrow.

"Daughter," said Father Andrea, "in this there is no repentance. Retire to your own chamber."

Lucia knelt before the Countess, and crossed her hands upon her breast: "Signora, pardon me."

The tone was unnaturally quiet. Beatrice imprinted a fervent kiss upon her forehead, as she whispered:—"God have you in His holy keeping for ever!"

Lucia fastened upon her a long earnest gaze, and rising slowly, walked to the door. She had scarcely reached it when strength seemed to fail her. She staggered, and would have fallen; but Father Andrea drew near to support her, and led her from the room.

It was long before the confessor returned. The Countess had then retired to her own chamber; and when they met again, he feared to tell her the intensity of Lucia's distress. His great anxiety now was to arrange for Lucia's departure, so that she might not meet the Countess again. Every plan seemed beset with difficulties; but when they were suggested to the Countess, he found her, to his surprise, already decided as to what must be done.

"The hour which she had passed alone had not," she said, "been idly spent. The way seemed clear before her. Father Andrea must take Lucia into Devonshire, and she herself would go immediately to Henningsley."

"Immediately!"—the confessor could not conceal his surprise:—"but you are wholly miscalculating; you are not equal to the journey."

"Father, I am equal to any thing now. I must see Margaret."

"But I cannot suffer you to travel without me, my daughter. It would be too great a risk."

"Nay," said the Countess, faintly smiling; "even you could not prevent me from feeling the effects of a journey; and, moreover, I must be accustomed to it. Are you prepared, father, to proceed to Italy without me?"

The confessor looked alarmed; excitement, it seemed, was impairing the Countess's judgment. "And with Lucia," continued Beatrice. "She must not be left, and we cannot be together."

"But to leave you! to suffer you to remain in England in your present state! My daughter, you are not aware what you are proposing."

"It appears strange, doubtless," said the Countess; "but my mind is made up. All things will come alike to me now, for my time on earth is short. All things except one."

Her eye grew brighter as she spoke, and Father Andrea listened eagerly for the next words.

"Father," continued the Countess, "I also have sinned, and my sin has brought its punishment. If Margaret should remain unconverted to the truth, the guilt will lie at my door. I cast her off. To-morrow, if God vouchsafe me strength, I will make another, a last effort. If the love and the prayers of the dying can have any power, Margaret shall follow me to Italy."

She paused breathless from eagerness. Father Andrea did not seek to answer her. "Dying" was the only word which rested upon his mind.

"Is there not hope?" pursued the Countess, in a tone sepulchral from its depth.

"Die! die!" repeated the confessor. His eye was fixed, gazing upon vacancy. Beatrice stretched out her wasted hand. He started from its touch; but the next instant it was pressed to his lips, and one scalding tear of agony fell upon it. The weakness was but for a moment, and the voice of severe composure with which he again spoke gave the Countess but little reason to suppose that the plan which she had brought forward was one which he himself most fervently desired. "Have you well considered this matter? Is it the safest course?"

"It is the only one, father, which now presents itself. In England I must not stay; but for Margaret, I would not wish to stay. The voice that summons me to the land of my adoption is a voice from my husband's grave. Where he sleeps in death, there would I sleep also."

"You overrate your influence, my daughter," said the confessor.

"If I do — but no, father, I do not. You tell me Margaret is unchanged; then she will follow me to the end."

"It might be so, if she were left to her own will; but Miss Percival has strict principles of duty, — the demands of her family will be first considered."

"Even there, father, I have foreseen all," said the Countess. "I have a lure for Margaret's duty as well as for her affection. Let her come with me, and it shall be under any conditions that she may please."

"I do not fully comprehend," replied Father Andrea, now betraying by his accent the eager interest with which he listened to the idea.

"Is it true?" said the Countess, after an instant's hesitation; "is it really true that Margaret has decided upon leaving her family, and working for her brother?"

"Yes, so she assured me. But in what way can this affect you?"

"Lady Anstruther goes with me to Italy," answered the Countess, "or rather she will precede me. In the winter we are to share the Palazzo Novera, and I have engaged to bring with me a governess for her child, who will remain with me whilst Lady Anstruther travels."

"I see, I see," interrupted the confessor quickly; "but," he added, with an air of thought, "the position will be difficult and humiliating."

The Countess looked up proudly. "Difficult and humiliating for my friend!—no, that can never be. And I know Lady Anstruther well: she is gentle and noble-minded, and Margaret will be happy with her. You also will be near to watch," she added. "Margaret will be safe with you whatever may be my fate."

The allusion to herself again shook the confessor's self-command, and it was in a changed voice that he replied, — "One greater than man will be her protection, if she will obey His voice."

"Yes, to Him we must commit her. But I would prepare for every thing. It is vain to speak of life when death is standing at our door."

"And Lady Anstruther would approve?" inquired the confessor, not trusting himself to reply to the observation.

"She will nowhere meet with Margaret's equal," replied the Countess. "Why should you be doubtful?"

"I am not doubtful, my daughter. Rather, I would look upon the suggestion as one sent in mercy to all. Few hopes have been so dear to me

as that of recovering Miss Percival from the path of error."

"Mercy to all! — to me above all!" said the Countess, reverently. "Am I not selfish, father, in blending my own happiness with Margaret's eternal interests?"

"Selfish! When we are summoned before the tribunal of Heaven, may my heart acquit me like yours!"

The unwonted expression of enthusiasm was followed by a more rigid air of self-restraint. A slight blush tinged the Countess's cheek as she replied, "My heart cannot acquit me as you think. I know not what is before me, except that it must be suffering. With Margaret all could be borne: without her, — father, I shrink from dying, not from death."

The confessor passed his hand before his eyes, to conceal the traces of human weakness, as he answered: "Will there not be heavenly aid, my daughter? Can a sinner wish for more?"

"Aid for the soul, — more, infinitely more than could be thought of or deserved; but for the body I have been faithless, and feared the loneliness of being watched and tended by servants."

"That would never be permitted," replied the confessor; "Lady Anstruther loves you too well."

"No, father, no," exclaimed the Countess; "she does not love me. Love is a word too holy, too deep, for the chance regard of this world; and before another winter shall arrive, I may be far beyond the reach of human care.

Father Andrea became suddenly thoughtful and silent. He appeared unconscious of the earnest look which the Countess bent upon him, dreading from his silence that some grave objection was working in his mind. But his abstraction arose

from a very different source. He was pondering upon the light that had seemingly been cast over his path; the way that had been opened through his difficulties; and even the heavy blight of grief which lay at his heart, as the knowledge of the Countess's danger grew clearer and clearer, could not check the exulting hope with which he looked forward to the realisation of his long-cherished wishes. Still his habitual reserve mastered the keenness of his feelings, and turning to Beatrice, he said, composedly, — "All this may be. We are blind, and must not trust to our own judgment of what is best; but one thing I can never consent to: I cannot leave you."

"It will be for the journey only," replied the Countess, "and if Margaret is with me I shall be better. There will be happiness for me then as long as it shall please Heaven to spare my life."

Father Andrea was still undecided, and Beatrice became more urgent. A sanguine disposition made her believe all things to be practicable upon which her heart was bent, and the first step now requisite, the meeting with Margaret at Henningsley, was thought to be an easy undertaking. Before night came, however, Beatrice was convinced that it must be postponed. She was even induced to consider the chances of failure in the plan, and to consent that, if eventually Margaret could not be prevailed upon to accompany her, Father Andrea should give Lucia into Lady Anstruther's care, with strict directions to watch her carefully, and never to lose sight of her until she was consigned to her friends, and that he himself should follow his original intention and accompany her. With this agreement they separated. Early the following morning, Father Andrea was on his way to Devonshire with Lucia. The Countess still persisted in her hope of being

able to leave London immediately; but nearly a fortnight elapsed before she was permitted to move; and Father Andrea, having by that time brought Lucia into a state of mind more consonant to his wishes, found himself at liberty to leave her, and to devote the remaining portion of his stay in England to the Countess and Henningsley.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Good news for you, Margaret, my dear," said Miss Debrett, entering the school-room unexpectedly, some days after Margaret's interview with Father Andrea. "Mrs. St. Aubyn — but I forgot the children: pretty darlings! cannot they run in the garden a little while?"

"Not very well," said Margaret, "in the midst of lessons."

"But just to-day; I really do want to speak to you particularly, and it is of consequence too. The Colonel ——"

"Well! yes, certainly, if you will," exclaimed Margaret in haste, knowing that if the secret communication were not made in private it certainly would be in public. "Run away, my dears, till I send for you."

The children were gone in a very few moments, books being thrown down in a hurry, copy-books blotted, and Grace's new silver thimble sent on a journey to the further end of the room. Margaret would have been vexed, if the mention of Colonel Clive's name had not absorbed her attention. Miss Debrett looked around to see that no listeners were left, and then carefully closing the door, said in a mysterious manner, "Colonel Clive, my dear, I suspect, grows worse and worse."

"Worse?" said Margaret; "but I did not know he was very ill."

"Not so much ill as fractious. Mrs. St. Aubyn says he is fidgetty, and nothing pleases him."

"I see no good news in that," observed Margaret.

"Possibly not just now, my dear; but it may come to good by-and-by. Mrs. St. Aubyn says she cannot tell what to do to amuse him; and she wants to have Agatha back."

"It is very kind of her," observed Margaret, unable to repress the momentary inclination for sarcasm; then checking herself, she added, "Mrs. St. Aubyn can scarcely think that Agatha will be happier under such circumstances than she was before."

"Possibly not, my dear; only Mrs. St. Aubyn thinks that her being away makes him more uncomfortable."

"How can that be?" inquired Margaret. "He did not appear to regret her absence."

"More, perhaps, than we think, Margaret; and besides, it is an awkward situation for a man. He is married, and he is not married, you see. He is not free in the same way he was before, and yet he is lonely; and people look strange at him, and talk."

"And no wonder," said Margaret; but she thought more of Agatha than of Colonel Clive.

"Then, Margaret," continued Miss Debrett, in a disappointed tone, — "you don't think there is any more hope?"

"I did not say that," replied Margaret. "I should be very sorry to think so; but I do not imagine that Colonel Clive's being fractious, as you call it, will be any temptation to Agatha to return."

"Why, when I say that he is fractious," replied Miss Debrett, "I dare say there is a fault with Mrs. St. Aubyn also. I have not seen her for some time before yesterday, and then she seemed put out. She said that she had received a letter from the Countess's

friend, the Italian girl, and that she was going to Italy directly; and that appeared to worry her, for I really think she liked her."

"What, directly! — Lucia Fontana? — and the Countess too?"

"The Countess too, of course," replied Miss Debrett.

Those careless words, "of course;"—they were a dagger to Margaret's heart.

"Are you quite sure?" she said.

"No, my dear, not sure, because I did not pay particular attention; but I know they are not coming back to Henningsley."

This was all the confirmation that could be required of that which Margaret feared. If Father Andrea had succeeded in satisfying the Countess that her affection had undergone no change, he would doubtless have persuaded Beatrice to return speedily; at least if they were unavoidably detained, she would have written. But nearly a week had elapsed, and nothing had been heard either of the Countess or the confessor. It was clear, therefore, that the letter had been received, and that the impression upon the Countess's mind was uneffaceable.

"You seem dull, my dear," said Miss Debrett, observing the alteration in Margaret's manner. "You are sorry, I dare say, about Henningsley; but things always come best as they are ordered; and it would have been much worse if you had not been going away yourselves."

Margaret fully agreed to the Mercy that plans all things; and from reasons, of which Miss Debrett was not aware. If, as within the last few days she had found reason to hope, her mother could be persuaded to consent to her wishes in favour of George, it would be much better that nothing should remain to tempt her to look back upon past happiness. A

stern, self-sacrificing, devoted spirit, bent only upon duty, could alone, with the blessing of God, support her through the ordeal.

"I was going to say something besides about myself," continued Miss Debrett. "You know time is getting on, and my year expires very soon, and Anne Duncan came over yesterday, and I was talking to your mother the day before, and really, if you must go — Alton is so far off — I don't think I should see you more than once in six months."

"And you are really inclined to accept Mrs. Duncan's proposal?" said Margaret. "I am sure it would be best."

"Are you? I am glad of that; but I don't like it, my dear; I don't like it at all. And I thought about Alton. I asked Mr. Sutherland one day whether there were any lodgings in the place, and he told me there was not one, except a bed-room at the shop, and that you know would not do."

"No," said Margaret, smiling. "You would be convinced of that if you were to see the shop."

"Ah! I forgot — you went over yesterday."

"George came for me," replied Margaret. "My uncle wished me to see the house which we are to have."

"How strange! I knew there was something that I wanted to ask about; but the Colonel's being cross put it out of my head. It was that — I do want to hear what you think about the place."

"I knew pretty well what it was like before," said Margaret: "it is a cottage; low, very low, compared with modern houses; that I think is the greatest objection. The rooms are of a tolerable size; the drawing-room seventeen feet by fifteen; and the bed-rooms are good; but we shall be rather crowded. Then there is a small garden, a good deal out of order, but it is on a hill, so it commands

a pretty view. We shall have a kitchen garden also, and be very near the church, and almost close to the parsonage."

"And what does your poor mother say to it?" inquired Miss Debrett, not particularly liking Margaret's moderate description.

"Mamma is very indifferent as yet," replied Margaret. "All places are alike to her since she must leave her home, except that she will find it a comfort to be near my uncle."

"Yes, and that will be delightful for you especially, my dear."

Margaret's heart was quite full. She could not find words to reply. That would have been her great comfort; but it must be given up, she must learn to live alone amongst strangers.

"What changes!" sighed Miss Debrett. "They make me think more about Agatha. She would be much better off at Ashington."

"Much, if she could learn to think so."

"And if any thing could be done to bring about a meeting between her and the Colonel," pursued Miss Debrett. "If he were to see her sweet pretty face again, I don't think he would like to part from it."

"Faces are pretty or not according to association," observed Margaret; but the remark was beyond Miss Debrett, though she felt its truth daily. Margaret's countenance, bright with intelligence, and softened by feeling and principle, was far more pleasing to her eye than Agatha's regular beauty. Margaret saw that she had gained all the information which was to be obtained, and now hoped that Miss Debrett would go, and allow the children to resume their lessons; but she was not yet to be released. In her interest for others, Miss Debrett had wandered off from the subject which concerned herself,

and now, returning to it, gave Margaret the details of her arrangements; which, although she would not at first acknowledge it, were all decided on. About the same time that the Grove was to be left, Miss Debrett's lease of her house would expire, and she had then settled upon removing to Eastlake. "She should, in fact," she said, "be scarcely more distant from her dear friends there, than she would have been if she had remained at Staunton. From Alton to Staunton it was said to be sixteen miles. From Alton to Eastlake it might be sixteen and a half, or seventeen; but in going out for the day the one mile did not much signify. At any rate she should be better off than staying behind when every one was away."

Margaret was surprised at the placidity with which this announcement was made; but the first shock being over, Miss Debrett found pleasure, rather than not, in the prospect of removal. It roused her; made her live, instead of vegetating from day to day; and the bustle was beneficial both to mind and body. She was even then full of business, though so little aware of the value of time, that half an hour had passed before Margaret was finally released; and it was at last only with the promise "that she would step over in the course of the afternoon, and give her opinion as to the best way of packing some old china. It was not to be sent off yet, but it was as well to be beforehand." Then followed a sigh, —a burst of lamentation, and all but tears. Miss Debrett's pleasures and sorrows followed each other as rapidly as the sunshine and clouds of an April day.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MARGARET would have given much to have been as ready as Miss Debrett in the art of turning her mind from one subject to another. But change at one-and-twenty is very different from change at five-and-fifty, especially when it involves the breaking up of every early association, and the entering upon an untried anxious life. Miss Debrett had reached the season when, as in childhood, the day bears its own burden, and the morrow is left to the providence of God. It is a season dependent, not upon age, but upon the events of life. To a religious mind there can scarcely come more than one very great shock, whether caused by death, or loss of fortune, or the bitterness of a disappointed hope, which eats like a canker into the happiness of after years. A certain portion of our lives is passed as in a dream. The world is then real; time appears eternity; and the joys of earth are prizes worthy of hope and fear. Even by those who are striving to fix their hearts upon higher things, this delusion is still in its measure cherished. We say that our home cannot remain unaltered; we talk of the "changes and chances of this mortal life;" yet we are using words of which we do not understand the meaning. The hour comes at last, fraught with the first great grief. For the moment we are stunned. In the anguish of our hearts we think that we shall never know happiness again. But the storm passes over, and the sunlight once

more gladdens our dwellings. It shines as brightly as ever in the eye of the world. Peace, and health, and cheerfulness, surround us; perhaps, even, increase of prosperity follows us in our new mode of existence. Men look upon us with envy, and say that we are again as we were in times past. In the secrecy of our own hearts, (if trial has done the work for which it was ordained of God,) we know that it is far otherwise. The veil has fallen from our eyes, and that which before we said, we now know to be true. Life, except so far as it is a preparation for heaven, has become one vast unreality.

Margaret had often read that she was a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth; but it was difficult to realise the fact whilst all things around her were pursuing their ordinary course. Her affections were bound to this world more firmly than she could ever have imagined, except by the shock of their uprooting. Yet even in this early stage of trial, whilst yet suffering from its immediate effects, Margaret experienced something of the blessing which accompanies it. The thought of further change was now comparatively indifferent. Pride, independence, dread of the world's observation, the pang of separation from those she loved, powerful feelings in all cases, and peculiarly so in hers, were now greatly subdued. Margaret was crushed; and to be crushed by the hand of God is, if we will, to be raised in the kingdom of heaven. This comparative quietness of mind was partially shared by Mrs. Percival. She had undergone even a greater change than Margaret. The tie which was severed was of a closer kind, and the home which was broken up, had been endeared to her for a longer period. She had not Margaret's strength of principles to support her; and her indifference frequently savoured more of apathy than of resigna-

tion; but, from whatever cause, she had become calmer in manner, and for the time less worldly. She could hear many things discussed now, which twelve months before would have aroused a burst of indignation; and even when Margaret hinted at the plan by which George might be maintained at college, and after gradually enlarging upon it, at last pressed her mother to consent, Mrs. Percival bore with the unwelcome suggestion, in a manner which Margaret had never ventured to calculate upon.

She did not indeed agree to it; she even said that nothing would induce her to do so; that Margaret would lower herself; that it was a sacrifice perfectly uncalled for; that George would not allow it; that she could not do without her; that the children's education would be quite neglected; that her own health was failing, and that she was bowed down by affliction; but in all this there was nothing of the imperious refusal which Margaret had expected; the "no, my dear, it is impossible." A multitude of objections presented at once, are, in general, less to be feared than one which is very decided. As regarded herself, Margaret deemed that for such an object, pride ought not for a moment to stand in the way. She did not profess to be without it; but she felt, that it was not only wrong, but humiliating, to indulge it. It was placing herself in a false position, under the world, when she ought to be superior to it. George's consent could not be withheld as it involved Philip's prospects also. The children were certainly to be considered; but Mrs. Percival was competent actually to instruct them, and Margaret knew that she need not fear for them in any way whilst subject to Mr. Sutherland's watchfulness. After a very few years she should be at liberty to

return home and take the charge again herself. Mrs. Percival's health was not a subject of much anxiety. She was not looking well; but this could not be expected; and her complaints were more of nervousness and low spirits, than of actual suffering. The idea of leaving her alone was that which weighed most with Margaret; but to Mrs. Percival occupation was every thing. With the children to instruct, she was in fact more likely to be happy, than if Margaret were performing the duty for her. The great change from a large house, a carriage, servants, and money, to a small cottage in a country village, had often given Margaret cause to fear that her mother's spirits would entirely give way, and that she would, in despair, yield all to her management, and sink into apathy. The necessity for exertion would remove this danger, and Margaret had no doubt in her own mind that her mother would in the end be the happier for it. This, of course, she could not suggest. The only ground upon which she could rest her wishes was the advantage it would be to all the family to have both George and Philip provided for, and the imprudence of allowing any personal objections to stand in the way of such an arrangement.

At one time Margaret had thought that Agatha would be Mrs. Percival's companion; but a new idea was now entertained; or rather, a slumbering hope was re-awakened. There did really seem some little prospect of a reconciliation with Colonel Clive, and every other consideration was clearly inferior to this. How it was to be accomplished was a difficult problem to solve; but Margaret knew that Agatha had listened, with patience at least, to Mr. Sutherland's advice, and, even if unwilling to make any advances herself, was not likely to reject them

when made by others. The cause of this comparative meekness was not, however, that Agatha was convinced of having acted wrongly. She still persisted in saying that her conduct was justified by circumstances; but time had somewhat softened the bitterness of her grief for the loss of her child, whilst it had brought a change, which made a residence in her own family very undesirable.

Agatha did not at all enjoy the prospect of a retired life at Alton. The luxury of Ashington was much more suited to her views of happiness, and she began to think seriously, that it might be possible to bear with Colonel Clive's temper better than with personal privations. Margaret was aware of the state of her sister's mind, and that her motives were low; but it was vain to expect that as yet Agatha would be governed by any higher. She was improved, certainly,—more forbearing and less selfish; and her feelings had been brought out by the late events: there was a germ of goodness which might, perhaps, in time produce fruit; but it would not do to wait for this, if it were practicable before to replace Agatha in her right position. It was with this view that Margaret, after Miss Debrett's visit, began to consider the steps which might be necessary in order to bring about the desired result. An interview with Mrs. St. Aubyn seemed to be the first point; but this was not easily to be obtained. Mrs. St. Aubyn had taken no notice of the family since the separation, and Mrs. Percival, whose pride was much incensed at her conduct, protested, when Margaret repeated Miss Debrett's observation, that nothing should induce her to be again on any terms of intimacy with her.

Events, however, were more favourable to Margaret's wishes than she had expected. She went in the afternoon to assist Miss Debrett in packing

her china. There was no expectation of seeing Mrs. St. Aubyn, for she had called on Miss Debrett only the preceding day. Margaret watched her carriage go down the road, and remembered the time when it had been Agatha's great pleasure and ambition to be seated in it; and Miss Debrett, as she looked out, remarked that —

"She could not think who would be Mrs. St. Aubyn's next favourite; now the Italian girl was gone, she seemed to be quite alone."

Then came some expressions of wonder as to what visits she could be intending to pay in that direction; but Miss Debrett's remarks were arrested by the surprising fact, that the carriage had only driven to the cross road, and had then turned.

"It was coming back."

Margaret withdrew from the window; but Miss Debrett remained where she was.

"I do think it is going to stop. Yes, actually. Margaret, my dear, what can be the reason? She was here only yesterday, and she calls so seldom. Just put that china jar back, and smooth the cloth, will you? Dear me! how untidy a room gets when one is packing!"

The room was not in the most perfect order, certainly; but Mrs. St. Aubyn did not give herself the trouble of criticising Miss Debrett's household arrangements, or mode of life. She visited her because she was well connected, and had been her acquaintance from childhood; but except as intimate with the Percivals, she often forgot almost the fact of her existence. Margaret wished herself away sincerely, though conscious that the visit might be of service to her views. She had no unkind disposition towards Mrs. St. Aubyn; but the meeting must necessarily be an awkward one. Mrs. St.

Aubyn, however, covered any surprise or confusion with infinite tact; shook hands, inquired for Mrs. Percival, and then informed Miss Debrett that she had left a small parcel in the entrance passage on the preceding day, which had been forgotten, and she had called to ask for it. Miss Debrett knew nothing of the parcel, and was quite "distressed that it should not be forthcoming; her servant might have seen it, and she would inquire." The bell was rung; but Anne delayed making her appearance, and Miss Debrett grew nervous, and against Mrs. St. Aubyn's entreaties, went to look for her. There was something beyond nervousness in this, for Miss Debrett, with all her simplicity, was aware that it might be of use to leave Margaret and Mrs. St. Aubyn together. Margaret became very timid and shy, when she found herself just in the situation which she had before desired. Her ideas were wandering, and her words seemed to be lost; and she could think of nothing to say, except that the weather was fine. Mrs. St. Aubyn was more *nonchalante*. She had reason to guess Margaret's opinions from observations which had been repeated by Miss Debrett; and as she was at that very moment looking forward to the infliction of a long evening with her brother, she was the more resolved that the present opportunity should not pass without some overtures for reconciliation. When two persons are alone together, each thinking of the same thing, and bent upon the same object, it is seldom that some mode is not found of introducing the wished-for topic. Margaret scarcely could remember afterwards how the conversation began; but something was said about the weather, then about flowers, flowers in general, flowers in particular, Ashington flowers, and at length Colonel Clive's name was mentioned, with

the remark from Mrs. St. Aubyn that he was looking very much altered. She fixed her eyes upon Margaret as she spoke, with a very meaning expression, and Margaret coloured, and said she was extremely sorry to hear it.

"Yes, he is altered; very much indeed. Really, sometimes, I scarcely know him; but poor man! he has suffered so much!"

This might have been the conclusion of the subject, if Margaret desired it, for Mrs. St. Aubyn made a dead pause. Margaret rallied all her courage, and said boldly: —

"It has been a very unfortunate affair from the beginning."

"Very: no one can feel that more than myself, having planned it all — set my heart upon it. But one never can guess beforehand how people will suit each other. It has given me a lesson for life."

"I hope we shall all profit by it," said Margaret. "No persons can have regretted what has passed more than we have done."

Mrs. St. Aubyn looked a little proud and doubtful. "Every one must be aware," she said, "that it was a very uncomfortable business; but she should scarcely have supposed that Mrs. Clive's family had been much distressed at it, seeing that they received her with open arms, and publicly supported her conduct."

"You do us injustice," replied Margaret, striving to retain a meek and gentle manner; "there was nothing else in our power. Whatever might have been Agatha's faults of temper, she had still a claim upon her parents, which they could not deny."

"They did not wish to do it," said Mrs. St. Aubyn, shortly; then, fearing lest her asperity of manner

might widen the breach, she added: "but it is no use to talk of the past."

"None whatever," replied Margaret.

Mrs. St. Aubyn was thrown back by Margaret's quietness. She had anticipated some avowal, which would have given her the advantage, and might at last have enabled her to gain, her object by patronage, and sympathy, and the offer (as a great favour) of using her best endeavours to put the affair on a better footing. But Margaret knew, that although Agatha had done very wrong, her conduct had not been unprovoked; and she did not choose to appear too anxious to see her again the mistress of Ashington. She remained silent therefore, being almost certain, from Mrs. St. Aubyn's manner, that the subject would be resumed, unless interrupted by Miss Debrett. But it was interrupted. Miss Debrett had found the parcel, and returned with it, and Mrs. St. Aubyn had no excuse for staying longer. Miss Debrett cast a wistful glance at Margaret, longing to know what had passed in her absence; but she could perceive only constraint in the manner of either. Mrs. St. Aubyn was forced to take leave; but, as she shook hands with Margaret, she said, in an under tone, —

"I should be sorry to think that the circumstances of which we have spoken were to last for ever."

"You cannot be as sorry as I should be," replied Margaret, whilst her manner carried with it the conviction of sincerity. "My sister's happiness must ever be very near my heart."

"And my brother's near mine," said Mrs. St. Aubyn. Margaret looked round for Miss Debrett; but she had again left the room, in order not to be in the way. Mrs. St. Aubyn marvelled at Margaret's composure: it proved that if any thing were

to be done, the advance must be made by her. "You have influence with your sister," she said, "if you could be prevailed upon to use it."

"I have used it," was the reply. "We are all most deeply sensible of Agatha's error; but her wishes can be of no avail unless she is assured that Colonel Clive is willing to forget the past; and I fear he is still indifferent, if not angry."

"Nay, there you are mistaken," replied Mrs. St. Aubyn, thrown off her guard by her own eagerness. "Since we are alone," and, casting her eye round, she assumed a more confidential tone, "I may as well speak openly. You are in error in thinking my poor brother indifferent. Angry he was no doubt at first, he had great reason to be so; Agatha behaved shamefully—you must excuse me for saying it; but he is not indifferent. In fact, I can see that the affair is preying upon his spirits. He is not at all well; Mr. Harrison threatens him with gout. I am sure if it is gout," she added, in a tone of despairing irritation, "I cannot think what I shall do."

"Then we have given Colonel Clive less credit than was his due," replied Margaret. "It doubtless has appeared as if he cared nothing whatever for the absence of his wife, or the loss of his child. A little expression of feeling on his side might have produced more on Agatha's."

"Agatha is decidedly cold," said Mrs. St. Aubyn; "and my brother is not of an age to express much."

"He expressed nothing," replied Margaret; "he does not do so now."

"But I tell you, my dear,"— the epithet escaped Mrs. St. Aubyn's lips quite unintentionally,—"I assure you he does feel: if Agatha were to see him she would repent of her conduct."

"Agatha does not require any considerations to

make her repent," observed Margaret. "She is aware that she has acted wrongly; but, as I said before, nothing on her side can be of any consequence unless Colonel Clive should choose to come forward."

This was arriving at something like a decided view of the case, and Mrs. St. Aubyn, after musing upon it for a few moments, said: "Am I to understand, then, that Agatha — Mrs. Clive, would not be averse from returning to Ashington, if my brother were willing to receive her?"

"I cannot answer for my sister's wishes," replied Margaret: "they would naturally be influenced by the manner in which any overtures for reconciliation might be made."

This was rather puzzling to Mrs. St. Aubyn. Overtures from Colonel Clive were not likely to be of a much more affectionate nature than "Colonel Clive presents his compliments, and hopes that Mrs. Clive will return." What Margaret meant by overtures she did not quite understand. "Well, my dear," she said, "it is a difficult matter, I see; but I will think upon it. It does not seem right that the case should continue as it is."

"No, indeed," replied Margaret; and she added more cordially than she had yet done, "you may be quite sure that, as far as the members of our family are concerned, no efforts will be spared to put it upon a better footing."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

And so Margaret and Mrs. St. Aubyn parted; and Margaret, after in some degree satisfying Miss Debrett's curiosity, returned home, almost in spirits. The idea of Agatha's being re-established in her proper position made her sensible how much her misconduct had added to the other trials which had been appointed for them. Yet it was with no very sanguine expectation that she more deliberately viewed her sister's prospect of happiness. To be the nurse of a cross, gouty old man, whom she did not love, was no very enviable situation. Margaret would not have been surprised if, after all, Agatha had drawn back. She did not dread the censure of society, or shrink from exciting public observation, as Margaret did. Perhaps, if her home had been what it once was, she would have continued to brave it; but Agatha had calculated worldly advantages before her marriage, and she calculated them again now; and when Margaret related the meeting with Mrs. St. Aubyn, she listened, thought, heaved a deep sigh, and said: "If it must be, it must; but mine is a hard lot." Margaret could not help at the moment thinking of her own. But there was one great difference between them. Agatha had the prospect of external prosperity, with the consciousness that the trials which accompanied them were of her own seeking: Margaret, the almost certainty of comparative adversity, with the knowledge that her sorrows were sent for good,

and that an Almighty arm was near to support her under them.

Mrs. Percival was incredulous when informed of the prospect of reconciliation. She was in that humour in which we are resolved that no good can befall us. Mr. Dampier's refusal to keep George at college had for the time completely destroyed her hopeful spirit. She thought it possible that Mrs. St. Aubyn might be in earnest—but impossible that Colonel Clive should ever be brought round; and Margaret, who had carried her the intelligence, trusting that it would give her pleasure, was blamed for imprudence in having named it to Agatha, and thereby exciting false expectations. Poor Margaret! the variety in her life consisted but in variety of trial, and it was a cause for gratitude that, being obliged to think for her family, she was enabled to forget herself. Beatrice and Father Andrea, religion and Mr. Sutherland, were kept for her midnight meditations. In the day, her thoughts were occupied in the business of the present hour. Perplexity and multiplicity of arrangements crowded upon her; yet she could see them working to one point. In a very short time they were to remove to Alton, and, before that, all affairs connected with the Grove were to be settled. Something also she saw must quickly be decided about George and Philip. Mr. Dampier had written again rather urgently. His wishes seemed directed to Philip rather than to George. He had a fancy for more entirely adopting him, and had even settled upon the public school to which he would send him; but he owned that George, as his godson, had the first claim. It was a great blessing to Margaret to reflect that events could not always remain in their present uncertainty; and as they seemed verging towards the consummation of her

own intentions, she forced herself to look at the latter steadily. Mr. Sutherland's doubts as to the state of her mind were very painful to her; she could not say that they were imaginary. With faith, humility, and earnestness, she yet seemed walking in a mist. Romanism appeared more visionary, but scarcely less attractive. It was only by forcibly turning her thoughts in a different direction, not allowing herself to indulge in reading, or in contemplations connected with it, that she could drive it from her mind. And whilst practising this restraint, she too often seemed fighting against truth. A hand seemed stretched out to guide her, whilst she presumptuously rejected it.

There was but one thought which had power to strengthen her in these seasons of temptation. Unless the English Church were indisputably proved to be no true church, she must risk the guilt of schism in forsaking it; and surely a God of mercy would pardon her if, in the dread of that sin, she were steadfastly to adhere to it, rather than upon her own responsibility to follow guides whose claims it was utterly out of her reach to demonstrate. This was the lowest ground upon which Margaret satisfied herself; at other seasons her convictions became much clearer. She could see then the perfect accordance between the Prayer Book and the Bible; and the wonderful wisdom which in days of stormy controversy had steered safely between the Scylla and Charybdis of Puritanism and superstition. She could descry a divine life at that very time, in the sudden awakening of so many minds to a sense of their awful responsibilities; and she could look forward, not without a hope, that the principles of the Church would eventually be revived every where, and the sheep which had wandered from her fold be gradually brought back.

Or, if this were not to be,—if the sins of past and present generations had indeed called down the vengeance of Heaven, so that her candlestick were doomed to be removed from its place, Margaret could still perceive that the Church of Rome could not for that reason claim her allegiance. Even if its doctrines were pure, if the Veneration of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints did not approach to idolatry, if the doctrine of Transubstantiation did not obscure the Catholic faith of the real spiritual presence of our Lord in the Eucharist, if indulgences were not held out by which the penalties of sin might be remitted, and souls released from Purgatory — if these and other human inventions were destroyed, still it could not be proved that the Bishop of Rome had a right to be the spiritual ruler of the English people. Reason was, though by slow degrees, becoming more powerful with Margaret than mere feeling, and she had hope that her uncle would in time be satisfied, and trust to the assurances which she had so repeatedly given, that she would teach all who might be entrusted to her care strictly according to the principles of the English Church, and never allow herself again to tamper with Romish books, either of doctrine, instruction, or devotion. The latter had been the most dangerous, for they had occupied her at unguarded moments; she had imbibed their spirit unconsciously, and from admiring the holy and elevated spirit which breathed through many of them, her mind had become prejudiced in favour of the communion with which they were associated, before she was in the least aware of it. Now she endeavoured to satisfy herself with the sober, but not less spiritual writings of the English divines: the devotions of Bishops Andrewes, Ken, Wilson, and Jeremy Taylor; the services for the different

divisions of the day, by Bishop Cosin; the Meditations on the Holy Communion by Christopher Sutton, and others of the same class; and above all, Margaret studied the Bible carefully, and endeavoured to draw out the instructions contained in the practical example it brought before her, so as to direct the conduct of her daily life.

But for the Countess Novera, Margaret might now have begun to taste something of peace, though not in outward circumstances, yet in her own heart. But suspense and uncertainty regarding her rendered all attempts at tranquillity nugatory. She was vexed with herself for not having made more particular inquiries of Mrs. St. Aubyn, although no opportunity had offered for doing so; and if it had, she would probably, at the time, have been unwilling to mention the subject. Even if Beatrice were inexorable, Margaret could not believe that Father Andrea would leave her without some further communication. After the sympathy and regard which he had expressed, he could not quit England without some note or message; and she rested upon this hope, whilst blaming herself for it; and accusing herself of deceiving her uncle, and still cherishing Romish affections, because she could not, by one effort, banish the past entirely from her memory. Every thing was now in confusion at the Grove; the children's lessons were very irregular, and often altogether missed; and the house began to assume the wretched, dismantled appearance, which precedes a departure. Margaret bore all heroically when in the presence of others, but there were most bitter moments when she was alone, engaged perhaps in looking over papers, packing books, or merely wandering from room to room, not knowing what was to be done, because there was so much to do. The merest trifle would

then recall the happy childish days which were gone for ever; and her thoughts fell of their own accord into melancholy contemplations. Her life seemed broken in two, and all the visions which she had most cherished were destroyed. Perhaps she had been wrong in indulging them, yet they seemed innocent at the time. At one period she had pleased herself especially with the children. She had taken great delight in marking their improvement, and had begun to carry out one or two favourite theories of instruction. Harriet was growing almost a companion, gentle and humble-minded, and lady-like in mind and manner; and Grace was taming down into a quick, agreeable, and not forward child; even little Juliet was showing a sensible affectionate disposition, under Margaret's training: nothing could be more hopeful. But all must be left. Margaret sometimes strove to console herself by thinking that the separation need only be whilst George remained at college; but her faith in the stability of all earthly prospects was utterly shaken, and she did not like to look forward for years to come. Many things she knew might happen to prevent her return home. Perhaps she was destined to be a governess all her life, and this gentle beginning was ordered in mercy, that she might be gradually prepared. Such thoughts were not unfavourable to her character. They taught her trust and submission, and she learnt more and more to live for the duties of the present hour.

There was enough in this to occupy her, especially when, two days after the interview with Mrs. St. Aubyn, she received a note which opened the prospect of the reconciliation with Colonel Clive more fully. Mrs. St. Aubyn began by stating that "she would have called; but she did not like

to intrude upon Mrs. Percival, just at that time;" a half excuse, which Mrs. Percival was not inclined to receive very favourably. Margaret, however, persuaded her to look at it more charitably, in consideration of what followed. "Mrs. St. Aubyn had thought much," she said, "of the conversation that had taken place. It had given her a hope that Mrs. Clive was aware of the extent of the wrong which she had committed, and was willing to repair her past errors." To this view of the subject Mrs. Percival strongly objected; but Margaret did not suffer her to dwell upon it, and led her on to the important parts of the communication which remained to be considered. Mrs. St. Aubyn said, "that on the day she met Margaret, she had visited her brother at Ashington. She had found him extremely unwell and depressed; he complained very much of being lonely, and was quite vexed at the notion of her going away, as she had intended, to stay for a month with some friends. He was not equal to moving himself; and, as he was threatened with gout, it seemed likely that he would be solitary for some time. Under these circumstances Mrs. St. Aubyn had deemed it a desirable opportunity to mention Agatha's name. Colonel Clive had listened more patiently than she had anticipated; and, although strong in his condemnation of his wife's conduct, did not reject the idea of receiving her again. Mrs. St. Aubyn thought that in his heart he was pleased, though it was not to be expected that a person of his age and disposition would show the sensibility of a younger man. He had inquired whether his sister had seen Agatha, and Mrs. St. Aubyn had then detailed her conversation with Margaret. Upon leaving him, she had ventured to ask whether he could consent

to see his wife, and his reply was not decidedly in the negative."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival when Margaret finished the note; "if this is all that Mrs. St. Aubyn can say, the affair had almost better remain in its present state. Not reject! not reply decidedly in the negative! It is a very strange way of making advances, as you call them, Margaret."

"But they are advances from a man like Colonel Clive, mamma," said Margaret; "and we must remember he has right on his side."

"I do not know that, Margaret. He tormented poor Agatha from morning till night, or she would never have gone away from him."

The reply was on Margaret's lips that no tormenting could justify the step; but the point had been argued again and again, and she had learnt never to continue a disputed topic, unless some positive good were to be gained by it.

"And now about this letter," said Mrs. Percival; "must Agatha see it? If she does, she will feel as I do."

"It seems to me that we are bound to act openly with her," replied Margaret.

"And lose our object? I must differ from you, my dear, entirely. State the case to her gently and plausibly, and she will listen to reason, and may by degrees be brought round. Shock her by such a cold, business-like note as this, and she will never allow the subject to be named."

The point was a difficult one, yet Margaret still persisted in her first opinion. She thought it right that Agatha should know precisely the terms on which she was to be received again. If she were to go to Ashington under false expectations, something in Colonel Clive's way of greeting her might provoke her indignation, and the result would be

worse than before. To suppose that she was to be acknowledged with any great show of affection was most improbable. This question, as it was one of peculiar importance, was discussed for some time; and Margaret's gentleness was at last rewarded by Mrs. Percival's saying —

"Well, my dear, the affair has been yours from the beginning, so manage it your own way; but remember, I prophesy that if Agatha sees this note, she will never return to Ashington."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MARGARET knew Agatha better than Mrs. Percival did. It was not with her a question of affection, but of worldly expediency, whether she should or should not persist in the present separation. Having decided that it was most desirable not to do so, the manner of reunion was a secondary consideration. Certainly she would have been pleased if great eagerness had been expressed for her return; and Mrs. St. Aubyn's note was undoubtedly repelling rather than otherwise. But Colonel Clive was a cross elderly man, labouring under an impending fit of the gout; and Mrs. St. Aubyn was a fashionable, silly woman, caring for no one as much as for herself. Little could be expected from either in the way of graciousness, and, in her inmost heart, Agatha's conscience whispered that little was deserved. Margaret had not much difficulty in persuading her to express something like regret at what had passed; a regret which was repeated in the answer to Mrs. St. Aubyn; and then both waited with a considerable degree of impatience for the next step. Margaret would willingly have taken advantage of the intermediate time to enforce upon her sister a few discoveries, which she had formerly made, as to the best mode of dealing with Colonel Clive's temper. He had some peculiarities, which, if opposed, rendered him furious; others, which, if soothed, kept him placid. He liked always to be made the first, to be consulted even on subjects not within his sphere of action. He was fanciful about

the placing of furniture, very exact in punctuality; he could not endure any person to be praised whom he had previously blamed; he always chose to settle in the morning exactly what was to be done during the day, and never, if he could avoid it, walked when he had arranged to drive, or drove when he had decided upon walking; and this was a rule which he endeavoured to make binding upon every one else. These, and others of a similar kind, were old bachelor ways, very irksome, but not unendurable; and Margaret was sure that, if Agatha would consult them, she might lead a comparatively tranquil life. But Agatha was going back to Ashington with no such principle of submission. She never intended again to commit herself by an open quarrel, but she was resolved to rule; and the determination was shown in the course of this evening's conversation, with a clearness, that made Margaret almost regret what she had done to promote her return. It seemed as if misery must be the result.

And could it well be otherwise? When the highest, the most sacred of all human ties, is formed without reference to the favour of God, upon a principle of worldly calculation, have we any right to expect aught but disappointment and wretchedness to spring from it? We "sow to the wind," and marvel that we are made to "reap the whirlwind." Agatha was excited, but far from happy in her prospects. There were recollections associated with Ashington never to be forgotten, and the expectation of returning to it vividly recalled the circumstances under which she had left it. But her mind was fixed, or rather she endeavoured to make it fix, principally upon the gratification to be derived there from worldly enjoyments. Margaret was keenly sensible that the eyes of the world would be upon her: even as Agatha's sister she could scarcely

endure the thought of the gossip and observations which would follow; and she was only too glad to think of the time when the family should have removed to Alton, and be beyond the reach of notice. But Agatha braved, or pretended to brave, all this. "The world," she said, "had no right to make remarks, and if persons chose to blame her, they must. She was satisfied in knowing that no one could be aware of half the provocation she had received."

It was whilst in this proud mood on the following morning, when Agatha was with Margaret in the library, superintending the taking down of some family pictures, that Mrs. St. Aubyn was suddenly announced. There had been a mistake of the servant who opened the door, and she was shown into the library. Agatha did then feel very uncomfortable, and was more grateful to Margaret than she had ever been before, for covering her confusion. It was the first time, except in talking to her uncle, that she had really perceived how wrongly she had acted. Mrs. St. Aubyn asked for a private interview with Margaret, and after retiring with her for some time, Margaret reappeared alone. She looked hurried, and seemed at a loss how to begin what she had to say; but after a moment's pause, breaking at once into the middle of her subject, she said, "Mrs. St. Aubyn is come, Agatha, to ask if you will go with her to Ashington directly."

"Me! directly!" and Agatha's cheek became very pale. "She cannot mean directly."

"Yes, indeed, she does. She has just been there. Colonel Clive is quite willing, it seems; but Mrs. St. Aubyn did not tell him what she meant to do, because she is sure that if you go there unexpectedly it will be much better."

"I cannot. I have not a thing prepared," said Agatha, now really frightened.

"We can manage all that. I will see about it for you. Indeed, Agatha, you must go."

"But not alone. You will come with me."

"How can I? Mrs. St. Aubyn never said a word of the kind."

"Then I shall not go without you," exclaimed Agatha. "To be alone with Mrs. St. Aubyn, and be lectured, and treated like a naughty child! No, Margaret, you may be quite certain I will not do that."

"Mamma is the proper person," said Margaret, thinking; "but she and Mrs. St. Aubyn will not do together."

"No," said Agatha, with a faint laugh. "They will be at daggers drawn before they reach their journey's end."

Agatha's manner, however, was more than half assumed; and after walking a few steps across the room she sat down, saying, that her heart was beating, and she could not stand. Margaret brought her sal volatile, went up stairs to fetch her bonnet and shawl, and then begged her to go to her mother, who had already been told of Mrs. St. Aubyn's proposal. Still Agatha delayed. She was so free at home, her mother was so indulgent, and Margaret so considerate. The little cottage at Alton, the small garden, and the limited income, did not appear totally devoid of charms. "If I had not agreed," she began.

"But you have, dearest; and you cannot draw back, even if it were right. You must not keep Mrs. St. Aubyn waiting."

"I must have you with me, Margaret."

"We will see. Go to mamma, and I will talk to Mrs. St. Aubyn."

Agatha came down stairs again with tearful eyes. Her mother had blessed her, prayed that she might be happy,—and a mother's blessing, even to the cold-hearted, can never be of trifling value. Margaret was prepared to accompany her, and Mrs. St. Aubyn was already in the hall. Agatha looked round for the children, but Margaret would not suffer her to delay, for Mrs. St. Aubyn was evidently impatient. Agatha sat far back in the carriage, and drew down her veil. She did now, at last, comprehend what it was to shrink from public observation, to dread lest some dear friend or intimate acquaintance should remark that she was driving again with Mrs. St. Aubyn on the road to Ashington, and spread the report, adorned and illustrated, of her reunion with her husband.

"You are faint, dear," said Margaret, in alarm, as they drove through the park gates.

Agatha shook her head; her faintness was more of the mind than the body. She was thinking of that morning when, in the cold grey dawn, she had parted from her husband's house a childless mother. Margaret was more frightened even than she had anticipated: responsibility seemed attached to her. But for her efforts the meeting might never have taken place. It is happy for us when events are beyond our own control; for at that moment Margaret would scarcely have ventured to move a finger to restore her sister to her home. Mrs. St. Aubyn alighted first, and hastened on. Margaret assisted Agatha; she could not bear the surprised, prying eyes of the servants.

"Just one moment, only one, wait," whispered Agatha, as they stood in the hall; but Margaret, with a desperate resolution, forced her to lean upon her arm, and they followed Mrs. St. Aubyn.

"Your master is in the study, I suppose?" said Mrs. St. Aubyn to the butler.

"Yes, ma'am, he has been sitting there all day."

"Perhaps I had better go first," said Mrs. St. Aubyn kindly, and really compassionating Agatha.

That seemed the most humbling moment of all. In her own house to be compelled to act as a stranger! She sat down in the little ante-room, and Margaret beside her. They heard Colonel Clive's gruff voice, and Mrs. St. Aubyn's more lengthened reply; and immediately afterwards the study-door opened, and the Colonel, leaning on his gouty stick, came out. This was much more than Margaret had expected. She glanced at Agatha to express her satisfaction; but Agatha was now cold and proud, as in her proudest days. She moved a few steps towards her husband, and stopped. Mrs. St. Aubyn came to her assistance. "We are going to say good bye to the past, and enjoy the present," she said, in a light, easy tone, as if speaking upon the most indifferent subject. "And now, I must just shake hands with you both, and tell you how extremely glad I am to see you together; and then, Margaret, you and I had better not keep the carriage."

"Wait, pray wait," escaped from Agatha's lips, as Colonel Clive held her hand in his, and afterwards kissed her cheek. Repentance for the folly of her marriage was stronger than ever. Margaret guessed her feelings,—there was hopelessness in them. Mrs. St. Aubyn ran on a few sentences about engagements, and delay, and the weather, and other commonplaces;—and Colonel Clive, rejoiced to have surmounted the first difficulty, began to inquire for Mrs. Percival and the rest of the family. In the extreme awkwardness of the interview he had become quite philanthropic, and even

remembered to ask for Juliet, and to inquire whether Symonds had left them.

Agatha did her utmost to join in the observations; conversation it could not be called; but Margaret read in her abstracted manner the dreadful weight which lay upon her heart. Mrs. St. Aubyn was soon tired of the part she had to act, and again wished to hasten Margaret away. Agatha's imploring glance, however, determined her to remain.

"She would walk back," she said; "it would not be too far; and Mrs. St. Aubyn would, by that means, be left at liberty."

"Then we shall not meet again to-day," observed Mrs. St. Aubyn, as she said good bye to her brother; "I leave you in better hands."

The Colonel smiled — what was for him a good-humoured smile, being really glad to have some one to cheer his solitude, and particularly relieved at having escaped a scene. He was thankful to his wife for her apparent impenetrability, and again took her hand with something which would fain have been affection. Agatha bore with him for a moment; but then she drew back, and hurrying from the room, beckoned to Margaret to follow. Her countenance revealed the anguish of her mind as she re-entered her own chamber. It was a fixed despairing look — still and vacant. Margaret stood near in silence. There are some trials; trials which we have brought upon ourselves, for which no words of comfort can be found.

"Oh, Margaret!" exclaimed Agatha at length, in a hollow voice. "You persuaded me to return."

"And I was right, dearest. You are now in your appointed place; and I am sure he is pleased that you should be here."

Agatha shuddered. "I could have endured reproaches better," she said: "I should have been

roused to answer them. It is worse now than ever, for it comes to me all new and strange. Margaret! it is horrible!"

"But, duty," said Margaret; "only strive to think of your duty; and if you can soothe him, and make him happy, you will feel differently in time."

"Soothe him!" Agatha's heart recoiled from the idea. She, who in marriage, had thought but of riches, luxury, independence, now to rest her hope of happiness upon her power of soothing!

"He has borne very much," said Margaret, almost afraid to say how thankful she really was for Colonel Clive's ready forgiveness, lest it should exasperate her sister farther.

"Borne!—yes; would that he had borne yet more — that the parting had been ——! Margaret, death would be better than such a life."

Margaret's imploring countenance brought Agatha to a calmer state. "You may condemn me, Margaret," she said; "but the fault was not mine. My mother taught me that riches could make me happy without love; and how could I tell then what it would be to despise my husband? Yes," she added, with something of her former vehemence, — "to despise him!" Agatha buried her face in her hands, in gloomy misery. Margaret could not resolve upon leaving her, though it was necessary. Perhaps there was no sorrow, that she had not actually felt, in which she could more entirely sympathise. But the thought which, in a similar case, might have aroused her to life and exertion, was not one likely to have an effect upon Agatha. Still Margaret felt that she must try. There was one view, and one only, which could be taken of her sister's present position, that offered any real consolation.

"Listen to me, dearest Agatha," she said, gently

withdrawing her sister's hands, and forcing her to look up. "Why dwell only upon the past? It might have been the error of your education, or your own mistake, or both;—but now it is irretrievable."

"And is that comfort?" exclaimed Agatha, indignantly.

"Yes, in a measure it is. If this trial had been ordered by God, as the circumstances of our birth are, you would see how to bear it patiently."

"But it is not. It is of my own seeking," said Agatha, in a stern moody tone.

"Yet you may act as if it were not. You may endeavour to turn it to its best account; and in so doing, it may be blest to you."

"Blest! A life with him!"

"Yes, with him; though not such a life as you once anticipated. If you respected him——."

"If! if!" interrupted Agatha, ironically.

"Nay," continued Margaret, quietly; "it is not an impossibility. Talent, your husband can never have; but an earnest, sincere, upright heart, he may have. God may give it him in answer to your prayers; and it is not talent which we respect, but goodness."

Agatha's eye wandered round the room, till it rested upon the small empty crib which stood in one corner. Then she dashed her hand across her eyes to wipe away the agonizing tears that rushed to them.

"We think that it would have been better," continued Margaret, following the direction of her sister's glance, "if your darling had been spared to comfort you."

"It must have been," said Agatha, in an under tone.

"Not if you should learn the sooner to prepare

to follow it: and if he should learn also. Agatha, dearest! you may teach him; you may show him what it is to be meek and forbearing; you may make him love goodness, and then he will practise it. It is your work upon earth now."

"No, Margaret, not mine: I have no goodness."

"But to strive," said Margaret; "to labour, and watch, and pray, that is for us all."

"You cannot think that he will change," said Agatha.

"I can and do think it; if you will use your influence in the right way. If you will begin first by watchfulness over yourself. And, Agatha, indeed he has had much to forgive."

Agatha's spirit was, for the time, partially subdued, and she bore the reproof without resentment.

"If you could begin to-day," continued Margaret, "in the little things, to consult his wishes; thinking for him, now he is ill; reading to him, trying to order what he likes, you would feel kindly to him, and there would be an interest, and it would be your business; even if you saw no improvement in him, you would in yourself. But he would improve; he must, if you will also pray to be forgiven and helped."

Agatha put her arm round her sister's waist as she sat beside her, and turning to her, said,

"Margaret, you were born to be the blessing of your family. If it were your lot, rather than mine, all would be well."

Margaret rose to go,—"God has given us each that duty which is most suited to us," she said, thoughtfully. "Yours may be better performed than mine."

"You do not still retain your wild, self-sacrificing notion?" exclaimed Agatha.

"Yes, indeed I do; but this is not the moment

to speak of it. I would rather think of you. We shall see each other every day now until we leave home."

"Home!" repeated Agatha; and the word was sad to Margaret's ear. That peaceful home of their childhood! how little had it been rightly prized by either!

"You will come down stairs with me," said Margaret, entreatingly.

Agatha hesitated, and the repulsive manner appeared again.

"This will be the first effort," said Margaret. "If you could show the least attention, I think now it would be accepted."

But stubborn, rebellious thoughts were working in Agatha's breast. She could care little for him, who had cared so little for his child; and she said it. Margaret thought that all her efforts had been thrown away; but she made one more appeal.

"If your sweet baby could speak now," she said; "her voice would have more power than mine. All is forgiven where she is."

Margaret watched her sister's face with some anxiety, for there were times when Agatha would not endure the least allusion to subjects connected with religion. Something, however, in Margaret's tone or manner, perhaps it was the simple earnestness, had touched Agatha, for she led the way herself to the study. Margaret's parting words were quickly said; but they were cordial and grateful to Colonel Clive, and full of affection towards her sister; and as she left the room, she saw Agatha push her husband's writing-desk and table into a more convenient position, and arrange the cushions in his gouty chair. Was it a sign of the dawning of a better day?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

And now all home cares, but one, were taken from Margaret's mind. Agatha restored to her husband, her mother's future plans fixed, and the arrangements for removing to Alton almost completed — there was but one thing still undecided, and Margaret, having nearly reached home, was considering how she should best induce her mother to give an immediate, definite, and satisfactory answer with regard to George and Philip, when she saw her uncle's horse at the Grove gate. Her heart bounded with something almost approaching to happiness. Where Mr. Sutherland was, comfort, and hope, and peace seemed always to follow. "I expected you to-morrow, but not to-day!" she exclaimed, as she hastened up to him.

Mr. Sutherland dismounted in his ordinary quiet manner, taking no notice of any one till he had seen his horse carefully led away to the stable, and then his face brightened, and as he greeted Margaret affectionately, he told her the business which had brought him over; the same business which had occupied her. "I heard indirectly to-day," he said, "that Mr. Dampier grows impatient upon this subject, and the delay is rather unpardonable. Margaret, we must make your mother settle something."

"We will," said Margaret; "but you must let me tell you our good news first. Mamma may be more inclined to listen to us now that Agatha is at Ashington."

"Ashington! Agatha at Ashington so quickly?"

"You forget you have not been here for some days, and I told you that events were working to this some time since. But you shall hear;" and Margaret led him into the garden, and recounted in detail the circumstances which had brought about the reconciliation. Mr. Sutherland was hopeful, but not quite as much so as Margaret wished. She thought that Agatha's eyes were really opening to the folly of her conduct. He feared that she was acting under a transient impression, and that, although an improvement might really take place for a time, both parties would eventually return to their former state. He would not, however, damp Margaret's expectations. She had enough that was real to oppress her without burdening her with fears for the future. "And, now you have eased your anxiety about others," he said, "you shall talk to me about the person who is always last in your consideration — yourself."

Margaret guessed what this meant, and would fain have avoided the subject.

"You are looking fagged," continued Mr. Sutherland.

"I am a little, I know; but I shall be better at Alton."

This was not quite sincere, for it was an endeavour to escape from an unpalatable topic; and Margaret was conscious of it directly she had spoken. "I mean," she added, "that I shall be quiet at Alton, and have less to do."

"Then you intend remaining there?"

Margaret looked at him with an attempt at a smile; but it was very forced. "How can I tell?" she replied. "You are the person to decide. I have tried to let the matter rest myself; but if we are to bring my mother to a determination immediately, my plans must be settled likewise."

"There lies the difficulty," said Mr. Sutherland. "Margaret, you will be candid with me, I am sure."

"If possible, I will; but the truth is, I can scarcely be candid with myself: I do not thoroughly know my own mind."

"That will not do if you are to teach others," observed Mr. Sutherland. "The inquiry becomes a very serious one then. You must forgive me, Margaret, for thrusting it upon you. I cannot help considering myself answerable for the step you are wishing to take."

"I shall never convince you of my sincerity," replied Margaret; "that is, not my sincerity, but my resolution. I promise you that my teaching shall be strictly in accordance with the English Church."

"But that can scarcely be if your mind is imbued with Romanism; if it dwells upon it."

"It does not dwell more than I can help," replied Margaret, "and I have given up all my Romish books."

"But not your Romish affections, dearest Margaret. Your heart still clings to the Countess. Whilst she remains in England I must have fears for you."

"She will not remain in England," said Margaret, trying vainly to speak with indifference. "I have heard through Mrs. St. Aubyn that she is going abroad."

Mr. Sutherland did not give utterance to the relief which he felt, and answered in a tone of affectionate compassion, "My poor child, this must be very hard for you to hear."

"It has been very hard," said Margaret, "to hear it from such a source; but it has done me good in one way; it has convinced me that I was wrong in trusting to the return of her affection. Father

Andrea doubtless finds that she still retains her anger."

"But he has not said so."

"No, that perplexes me. Yet he may see that she has given me up, and not have the heart to tell me so. I try not to expect to hear any thing more about them; still the wish is ever present. You are not vexed with me for it, are you?"

"Vexed! no, indeed, my love. I would give a great deal to set your mind at ease. To part in anger and mistrust is to bear a burden through one's whole life."

"There was neither on my part," said Margaret meekly; "but I know I gave her cause for annoyance, if not suspicion, about Agatha. I did not treat her with the confidence she deserved, and I cannot remember what I said in the letter: I was too wretched. She cannot be wrong, but I may be."

Mr. Sutherland could not agree to this; but he would not distress Margaret by blaming Beatrice. Secretly he accused her of caprice; and, much as he desired Margaret to relinquish her friendship, he still longed to give her the comfort of a few last words of affection. "I will not ask you to forget her, Margaret," he said. "I know too well myself how fondly memory clings to those whom yet we would not for worlds recall to dwell with us; but I am sure you will see, by-and-by, how mercifully all these events have been ordered, and how these external circumstances have assisted you in turning from the temptations of Romanism. You have had no solicitations to struggle against."

"No," replied Margaret; "sometimes I think that my strength has been untried."

"I cannot really doubt that it would stand," observed Mr. Sutherland; "but it would be scarcely

right to undertake such a change as you contemplate until you are more certain of yourself."

"And when will that be?" asked Margaret, "and what is to be done in the interim?"

"It is now July," replied Mr. Sutherland. "George need not return to Oxford until October. Before that time there is every reason to hope that, by prayer and constant effort, your mind will have become more settled. At Alton we shall be together constantly, and you shall work under me in the parish, and we will read and talk together, and enjoy the blessing of the daily services; and I think you will see that the English Church, when her principles are carried out, does not leave her children destitute of guidance."

Margaret sighed. It was a bright picture, but all the more dark was the separation that was to follow it. She was resolved, however, not to allow herself to be diverted from the actual business before her, by any morbid or even innocent anticipations of future sorrow; and she now inquired how it would be possible to defer her own plans until the autumn, and yet give an immediate answer to Mr. Dampier.

"It has struck me," continued Mr. Sutherland, "that, under any circumstances, it would be wise if your mother will consent, to accept the proposal at once for Philip, and leave George to be provided for in some different way. If it cannot be by taking orders, we must hope that other prospects will open for him. He is steady and clever, and his education has been extremely good. I really have no fear for him; but Philip may be an anxiety to you for years, unless you take advantage of the present opening. A public school is exactly the training he will require; and it can be no injustice to George, as he hates the idea of the merchant's office, and told me

this morning at breakfast that, except as a matter of positive duty, he would not accept it on any terms. Of course he knows nothing of your plans."

"Then we may go at once to mamma with the proposition," said Margaret. "Is it impatient to wish that my own future lot could be settled at the same time?"

"Perhaps it may be. I would not say, Margaret, that impatience was not your besetting sin."

Margaret stopped in her walk, as if to consider. She could never feel angry with her uncle, however he might reprove her. "Impatience with the children?" she said, in a musing tone. — "Yes, I think I can see it there. I was and I am too eager for perfection."

"That was the cause of the era of day dreams," said Mr. Sutherland, smiling; "and then came the Church."

"Came!" said Margaret, sadly; "it is the present, not the past."

"It is more the past, I hope, than it was. I think you can bear better with irregularities and inconsistencies than you did."

"It seems wrong to bear with them sometimes," said Margaret, "as if one was becoming lukewarm."

"It can never be wrong to bear with that which it is out of our power to remedy; and there is one mode in which we may all indulge our zeal to the utmost. We may pray, pray for perfection, and then rise from our prayer to act meekly and strenuously under a state of imperfection."

"And see the Church of Rome working at our side with such gigantic machinery," said Margaret.

"Yes; and yet labour diligently in our own sphere, though our hands may be tied, and our feet crippled. It is, we know, a fact in natural philosophy, that the deprivation of one sense quickens

the powers of the others; so it may be, and so it may be intended to be, in the Church."

"And how?" inquired Margaret.

"Look at cases similar to your own," replied her uncle. "There are a thousand such at this moment in England, setting aside the snares of Romanism which were peculiarly thrown in your path — cases of young persons whose eyes are becoming open to Church principles, who are very eager and sincere, longing to work for the Church, conscious of their own deficiencies, willing to throw themselves into the hands of any one having authority to guide them. Now the training which may be required for their minds may be precisely the reverse of that which in our ignorance we believe good for them. To give them strength it may be necessary that the power of exercising their newly-awakened senses should be for a time suspended, that they should be thrown back upon themselves, not allowed to rest upon others."

"But there can be no strength without Church ordinances," said Margaret.

"Nay, Margaret. Ordinances are valuable because they are means of grace. Grace is the gift of God, and God is every where. If, for instance, from unavoidable circumstances, any individual, earnest-minded and devoted, is deprived of the blessing of daily services and frequent communions, there cannot be a doubt that the loss will be supplied by prayer, and the diligent use of the blessings still left; and when the desired occasion is granted, that person's faith may be all the stronger, because for a time he has been left without external support."

"I do not feel that it will ever be so with me," said Margaret.

"But I feel it, and am certain of it. It is so now, though you cannot perceive it. The simple rule is,

to make the very utmost of whatever is given us, remembering that the least is infinitely more than we deserve."

"It would be easier to be satisfied, if we could exclude the view of Romanism," said Margaret.

"I should not agree with you, if your mind were in any other state," replied Mr. Sutherland. "It is a one-sided view which you take of the Romish Church. You see the good, but you never think of the evil. If you look at Romanism at all, you are bound to look upon it as a whole. Put Ireland by the side of England. Indulgences for sin, by penance, when it is committed. Secret infidelity, by the side of public sanctity. The evils of confession, by its good. The widely differing and contradictory statements, by the professed infallibility. Romanism is an immense field, embracing centuries that are past, and spreading itself over the whole world. View it in part, and you may fall down and worship. View it entirely, and you must look upon it with awe as the greatest mystery, the most wonderful combination of evil and good which has ever been exhibited to mankind."

"Yet persons may be excused," said Margaret, "if they find it difficult to work for the English Church whilst she is so fettered."

"Let them try," answered Mr. Sutherland: "if they cannot have the public services, they may maintain the principle of unity by the appointed reading in private; and there are those who have found the daily prayers of the Church, even in their own closets, a very great help and comfort. So again if saints' days, fasts and vigils are not observed, they may mark them by unostentatious practice in secret. If there are no sisterhoods or fraternities devoted to the service of the poor, they may content themselves by visiting the poor under the sanction and direction of their own clergyman.

The responsibility in these matters lies not with the many, but the few."

Margaret could not help contrasting the sobriety of this advice with the ardent eloquence of Father Andrea. She could not yet choose between them; yet unwearied energy without external aid must necessarily be more rare of attainment than with it; and she asked herself whether the life of a saint might not then be within her reach as fully as if she were dwelling within convent walls.

Mr. Sutherland was more satisfied than he had expected to be with the little which Margaret had said. He was thankful and hopeful; and concluded the conversation as they re-entered the house, by expressing his belief, that ere long she would find full peace under all disadvantages; adding, nevertheless, "the blessings, of which we have spoken, are of infinite value, and we will not cease to pray that they may at length be enjoyed by all. And now we will go to your mother."

The conversation with Mrs. Percival was long, and unsatisfactory, especially to Margaret. Her mother seemed bent upon taking the most gloomy view of every subject brought forward. She could own, that it was desirable for Mr. Dampier's offer to be accepted for Philip; but instead of looking at the relief of having him provided for, she would dwell principally, almost indeed entirely, upon the loss to George; with his education, his hopes, his great talents, it was a grievous disappointment. Her gratitude for Mr. Dampier's liberality was quite neutralized for the time by the conditions he had annexed to it. Margaret hoped that it might not be an unfavourable moment for referring to her own views, and said that her uncle agreed in thinking that in October, if her wishes remained the same, it might be desirable to put them in execution. But

this hint only made Mrs. Percival the more wretched. She declared that she had long anticipated a change. She knew they must come to ruin. Craven's conduct had been most unjustifiable; but she had never imagined that one of her daughters could be reduced to be a governess. Margaret softened the idea as much as possible by saying that it would only be for a short time. They might all look forward to the period of George's ordination, when he would return to Alton to be his uncle's curate, and live with them. For a moment Mrs. Percival's face brightened; but that day was too far off to be reckoned upon, and Margaret would, she asserted, be marked for life.

"Marked only as hundreds and hundreds of others higher and better than myself have been, dear mamma," said Margaret.

"That may be, but it makes no difference; and I cannot help thinking there must be some way of escape. It seems as if, now that Agatha is at Ashington —"

"Oh! no, no, mamma," exclaimed Margaret; "if they had millions we could not accept any thing from them. Obligation to Colonel Clive!"

Mr. Sutherland interposed a warning. "Take care, Margaret. We must not be proud, even as regards incurring obligations. But," he added, "it is quite true that you would suffer much more in the end; and just now, after Agatha's conduct, the case would become still more awkward."

"Impossible! quite!" replied Margaret, eagerly; but her uncle's reproof of impatience came to her mind, and she added, in a more subdued tone, "Dear mamma! if we could only make you think as we do!"

Mrs. Percival was much distressed. Her reason could find nothing more to object, yet her feelings

were as strongly opposed as ever. It was the publicity, the observations, which she dreaded, and against these Margaret could bring no arguments. They were more painful to her than she would ever have allowed her mother to imagine. Mr. Sutherland perceived that they had gained ground, although not a victory, and now proposed that the subject should be left for the present. "A few weeks hence," he said, "they might all be able to look at it more dispassionately, and since they had settled the immediate question, the other would bear delay."

Margaret tried not to be vexed, but she was inclined to complain of both her mother and her uncle, for not sufficiently considering how much this continued suspense must cost her. Her spirits were more depressed than they had been at all, and Mrs. Percival was so wretched that she kept her room the whole evening. Margaret could scarcely rally, even with her uncle's assistance. The house was extremely uncomfortable, a great part of the books and furniture having been already forwarded to Alton. One sofa only remained in the drawing-room, and one table. The dining-room sideboard was gone, and her father's favourite arm-chair. Margaret missed that more than any thing; she recollected it from infancy. There was nothing to enliven her within-doors, and without, the air was chilly, and the sky gloomy; whilst the long twilight was a reason for not sitting down to any regular occupation. The children played in the garden until quite late, and their voices were as merry as if care and sorrow had never invaded their home. Yet Margaret could not envy them; the happiness was but for the present hour. She had enjoyed it once herself; but as surely as affliction had come to her, so surely, if God spared their lives, must it one day come to them. Mr. Sutherland did his utmost

to cheer her, sometimes by hopeful anticipations, and at others by more serious considerations; and Margaret liked to listen to him; but his words did not fully reach her heart. Her thoughts would wander back perpetually to the preceding year. Just at that time she had been so very happy with Beatrice, and her home had been so cheerful. She could have prophesied then that years would pass without bringing a change. But, before they separated for the night, Mr. Sutherland proposed a scheme which gave Margaret something to think of and rest upon. He saw that they were lingering unnecessarily at the Grove. Alton was in a certain degree ready for them, and they might if they chose go there at once; and it certainly seemed to him that it would be best. The carriage was to be kept for another month, so that they might drive over from time to time and give orders; but the principal work which now required to be done must be entrusted to the servants. Baker would remain to superintend, and Symonds, who had expressed a wish to stay with his mistress until she was settled in her new home. Margaret did not entirely accord with this idea, for she did not wish Mrs. Percival to see the cottage at Alton until it had been put into a more complete state. There was much in first impressions, and her mother was particularly alive to them. When they had been there before she had expected nothing but an empty house, and of course did not care about it. Now, if she found only disorder and discomfort, it would be likely to add materially to her dejection. Mr. Sutherland doubted whether in any case this could be avoided, unless Margaret could herself be on the spot to superintend the arrangements; and he then suggested a plan, which he had previously rejected as perhaps less desirable for the family, though much

more pleasant to himself, and, he hoped, better for Margaret; that she should go with him to Alton, occupy the cottage, and assist in putting it in order, and then return to the Grove to make the final arrangements for leaving it.

In this proposal Mr. Sutherland had views distinct from the general comfort. There were no external aids in the parish of Deering to assist Margaret in acquiring that reverence for the English Church which would be her chief safeguard in any future efforts that might be made by Father Andrea or the Countess; and how soon these might be attempted he could not tell. Margaret had never yet been in a position to judge of the working of the English Church, and when Mr. Sutherland gave her instances of the zeal, and judgment, and self-denial with which in England the clergy were exerting themselves for their people, he could perceive something of incredulousness in her manner. It was much easier to believe what she saw, than what she heard. At Alton, though Mr. Sutherland would have been the first to acknowledge deficiencies, there was much which might have the effect of strengthening her mind; and with this view he now proposed to her to return with him the succeeding day. Margaret was thankful for the proposal, though she could not at once agree to leave her mother; but Mr. Sutherland urged it strenuously, showing her that it would in the end be for the good of all; and she was at length prevailed upon to seek Mrs. Percival's consent.

They were melancholy minutes which Mr. Sutherland spent during her absence. There had come no change to him; he was a solitary man—independent—prosperous: yet as he stood in the desolate, dismantled room, and listened in vain for

a sound to break the death-like stillness, memory recalled bright hours, and happy faces, and seasons of enjoyment which could never more return, and thought turned from the deserted house to him who had been its master, now lying in his grave; and the anguish of recollection was for the moment as completely overpowering to him, as it could have been to those whose life was, as it were, from this time to begin anew. Margaret came back to her uncle, and said more cheerfully that her mother had consented to his plan, and was rather pleased with it. Mr. Sutherland could scarcely smile, though for Margaret's sake he tried to do so; and after a little more conversation they separated, and Margaret went to her room more resigned and more willing to believe that every thing would eventually work for happiness as well as good.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was but a cheerless prospect for Margaret, when she alighted at the gate of the little cottage which was from henceforth to be her home. Her description to Miss Debrett had been very correct; but though an unprejudiced eye might have discovered without difficulty many good points about the place, Margaret was now chiefly struck by the dust and confusion, and the piles of furniture which filled the house, seeming as if no room could by any possibility be found for them. Mr. Sutherland left her to decide for herself what was best to be done, whilst he went to his parish duties. "He would return," he said, "before long, and see what progress she was making; but he hoped she would try and not fatigue herself too much, as he had set his heart upon taking her for a walk in the evening." His concluding words were, "We dine early, not to interfere with the evening service." Margaret was little accustomed to the idea of going to church on the week-days, and could scarcely comprehend what it would be like; but there was something tranquillising in the idea. The walk she soon decided would be out of the question. It was very well for Mr. Sutherland to propose it; but he had never assisted in the business of removal from one home to another, and could have no idea of the exertion it required. She tried to sit still herself, and give orders; but this, it was soon found, was not sufficient; and when Mr. Sutherland came to her about

a quarter of an hour before dinner, he found her completely wearied. It was a tête-à-tête dinner, the curate being absent, much to Margaret's satisfaction, as she was little inclined for conversation with a stranger. Mr. Sutherland was glad also. This was what he had often wished, — to have Margaret to himself in his own parish. Perhaps, if it had been possible before, she might have been spared many trials of faith and principles ; but it was too late, even if it had been right, to wish that circumstances had been differently appointed. Margaret acknowledged voluntarily that the vicarage was all she could have pictured as the residence of a country clergyman. It was small, but pretty, and convenient, and so simple in its furniture and arrangements, that she could not fix upon any thing which might be dispensed with, even for the purpose of assisting George at college. Mr. Sutherland talked to her of his parish and his housekeeping ; and as a dinner was sent from the table, he said, " It is for a poor girl, Margaret, whom I should like you to see. She is not in want; but illness makes persons fastidious, and it is a pleasure to give her pleasure. I think sometimes she may resemble the one you knew, who died at Henningsley."

The name sounded strangely unnatural to Margaret in that new place, and under circumstances unconnected with the past. A dreamy indistinctness came over every thing, and even with her uncle it seemed that Alton could never be her home. Mr. Sutherland did not press the subject but Margaret renewed it by remarking, " that Rhoda was by nature no common person ; and that her religion made her still more peculiar."

" Probably," replied Mr. Sutherland. " Romanism is especially suited for enthusiastic minds."

"And can you allow that the English Church is insufficient for the case you named?" inquired Margaret, quickly.

"No, not for a moment; but there is one great difference, I imagine, in the two instances. In the one, enthusiasm found vent in religion; in the other, religion has subdued and directed enthusiasm."

"Perhaps so," replied Margaret, with an air of thought; but she did not seem satisfied, and Mr. Sutherland continued: —

"You shall judge for yourself, soon, and I will tell you a few facts beforehand."

"There must be great allowances made for difference of disposition," observed Margaret.

"Very great; it was for that reason I remember once expressing a wish to you that I could have an opportunity of visiting Romanists in seasons of severe illness. A single example is not sufficient to enable one to form a judgment of the temper of mind which the system is likely to cultivate."

"It gives peace," said Margaret: "yet not entirely so," she added, correcting herself.

"And peace is no sure test of truth," replied Mr. Sutherland. "A clergyman, above all, has reason to know that."

Margaret saw that the remark was connected with reminiscences of sadness, and felt unwilling to break the long silence which ensued. Mr. Sutherland at length looked up and smiled; but not such a smile as Margaret was accustomed to see, when he had shaken off care, and allowed himself rest at the Grove. "Alton habits are unsociable," he said. "I shall learn to make myself agreeable, now you are here."

"I would rather you should learn to do just

what you are accustomed to do," replied Margaret as she rose from the table.

"I am not certain that my customs are good, Margaret. It is very well to think, but one may think till one is inclined to despair."

"You! here!" exclaimed Margaret, in surprise, where you have every thing as you desire it."

"Every thing but one; that which is my work and object."

"The human heart," said Margaret, gravely.

"And the charge of one's own being sufficient to occupy a whole life," continued Mr. Sutherland.

"It cannot be wise to think too deeply upon such a subject," observed Margaret; "no wonder that you look thin and care-worn."

Mr. Sutherland rather abruptly changed the conversation, and Margaret conjectured the cause. It was seldom that he spoke of himself, even to her. "You will be busy, I suppose now," he said, "until the time for evening service. I will come for you unless you are too tired. If you will take my advice, you will rest previously."

Margaret, however, when she returned to the cottage, was not inclined for rest. Occupation was a blessing: it left no room for melancholy thought, and there was a recollection which soothed her unconsciously; the knowledge that at a certain hour there would be a pause in the business of life; a season, when, for a short space, present grief and bitter memories, shame, and repentance, and self-distrust, and the undying hopes of the spirit born for immortality, might be laid open to the eye of the all-merciful God. Mr. Sutherland appeared at the appointed time. He had recovered his naturally cheerful look, and noticed with evident pleasure that two amongst Margaret's assistants at the cottage were preparing to accompany them.

"Yet we must not let them think that the mere going to church is a virtue," he said to Margaret: "they are sadly inclined to do so."

"It must be very difficult for the poor to find time," replied Margaret.

"Yes, for mothers it is. Indeed one can scarcely ever expect to see them; but the quietness of mind which the daily service brings would be an incalculable help to them in bearing the troubles of their lot. Some of the best of my people arrange to go alternately, morning and evening; and the neighbour who remains at home take care of both families."

"I am not sure that I appreciate the benefit thoroughly," said Margaret.

"Wait till you have tried. There are a great many plausible, and not irreligious, arguments to be used against the daily service; but there is one for it, which, independent of the directions of the Church, to me is conclusive. I have never heard of a single person in the habit of attending it voluntarily, who has not derived comfort and advantage from it. It is to the day what the Sunday is to the week."

"The home to which they go is a quiet one, at any rate," said Margaret, looking up at the church, which they now had nearly reached.

Mr. Sutherland stopped, and looked at it also, with an expression of reverent affection. "Yes," he said, "we are standing in the world now, and there are the graves, the visible symbols of death; and the building, which is the type of heaven. It must be a blessing to enter it morning and evening."

Margaret walked on in silence. They were a few minutes too early, and Mr. Sutherland remained to rest when they had ascended the little hill on which the church stood, that Margaret might enjoy the

view from it. Margaret was tired with her day's work, and at home she would have believed it very difficult to continue to exert herself longer; but she did not think about it at that moment. Rest seemed at hand for her mind, and that might be as necessary as for the body.

"You have not seen my church since it has been restored," said Mr. Sutherland. "They were working at it a good deal whilst I was abroad, and now, at last, I think it is nearly all that it should be."

Margaret had not as much knowledge of architecture as she had taste for scenery, and her eye turned from the building to the landscape. The churchyard partly covered the summit of an eminence, terminating on the south in a steep bank of red sand, overhanging a clear, winding river. Mouldering tombstones, and half-legible names and dates, told of the generations after generations who had been borne through the Lich-gate at the north-east entrance, to be laid where "the rude forefathers of the hamlet" for ages had slept in peace. But neither the storms of nature, nor the more destructive hand of man, had left any traces of spoliation upon this quiet home of the dead, beyond the signs of slow decay shown in the crumbling of the grey stones, and the stains and indentations upon the inscriptions. Piety had guarded the consecrated ground from profanation, and flowers grew upon the graves, and the cypress and the yew spread their branches over them, luxuriant and uninjured. Without a thought of neglect or forgetfulness to jar upon it, the mind could revert from death to life; and the carefully-tended, peaceful churchyard seemed but a fitting foreground for the beauty which lay around it. Yet it was not beauty of any striking kind. The deep clear stream glided swiftly and noiselessly onward, reflecting the purity of the

summer sky and the fleecy clouds which floated over its surface; but its winding course was bordered only by broad green meadows, studded with trees, and backed by a soft, misty range of low hills. A few thatched cottages, and gardens bright with flowers, lay to the right; and on the left, a little higher than the churchyard, stood the vicarage. It was in the spirit which hallowed it, rather than in each separate detail, that the churchyard of Alton was lovely; but Margaret did not care to inquire into the sources of her pleasure. It was sufficient that she was calmed and refreshed by the bountiful gifts of God. Yet sadness soon followed her enjoyment; for all which she saw at Alton made her the more sensible of the trial it would be to live at a distance. Mr. Sutherland entered the church. and Margaret with him. Margaret had been in it once or twice before, and had often wondered to hear her uncle say that it possessed great capabilities, and might be made very beautiful. She had remarked herself that it was clean and well kept; but in point of architecture it appeared little superior to Deering; being filled with large square pews, darkened by galleries, and disfigured by blocked-up windows. Now it was indeed a church, a temple meet (so far as human art could render it) for the worship of God. The style was irregular; the aisles being divided on one side by short massive pillars, supporting early pointed arches, and on the other by columns of a later period. Perhaps the first effect was almost too sombre, from the thickness of the dark rafters, and the deep hues of the stained windows in the chancel; but the mellowed light softened the brilliancy of the colouring about the altar, and of the scrolls, bearing texts from Scripture, which were painted upon different parts of the edifice. That which might have been a loss

in actual utility, was a gain in the effect which external causes insensibly inspire. The solemnity of the church was felt by Margaret instantaneously, and it prevented her from allowing her thoughts to be distracted by admiration. The change from the business of life to the sanctity of religion was brought vividly before her; and with comparatively little effort her attention fixed itself upon the service. It had never seemed so quiet, so hopeful; so suited to relieve the oppressive burden of sin, and point to the mercy which has provided a Ransom. And as Margaret listened to the absolution—really pronounced as a pardon to those who truly repent—she acknowledged, in the secrecy of her own heart, that it was indeed a comfort to the weary spirit to be permitted to confess the weight of the day's offences, and receive the assurance of forgiveness. It was easier to guard her thoughts then, than it had ever been at Deering in the Sunday service. There, the words seemed more a matter of course; here, the few persons who were joining in the service, raised their voices in earnest devotion; and if Margaret's attention wandered, it was recalled by some reverent attitude, or peculiar emphasis, which showed that the worship was the worship of the heart. When the prayers were over, and the little congregation had left the church, Mr. Sutherland made Margaret walk round it, and pointed out its peculiar beauties. "He was teaching his people, by degrees," he said, "to have it left always open. There were many times when solitude would be a great blessing to them; and yet, in their own crowded houses, they could not enjoy it. At certain hours the church was always kept unlocked; and by-and-by he hoped they would regard it with reverence enough to prevent any fear of desecration."

Margaret owned it might have a very beneficial

effect, but there seemed few to enjoy it; the congregation was very small. Mr. Sutherland waited to reply. They were standing before the porch, looking through it upon the silvery waters of the river, which from that point seemed to flow immediately underneath the walls. When they emerged into the open air, he went to the edge of the bank, and leaning over it, said —

"Think, Margaret, of the beauty which God has spread abroad for our use; its profuseness, in desert spots where none can see it; its minuteness, so that much can only be discovered by a microscope; and its extent, embracing all things. How contrary this is, if one may venture to say so, to the utilitarian spirit of man!"

"But I did not mean," replied Margaret, "that I would not have any services because there were few to join in them. That always seems to me a most false argument, especially when we consider the promises made to prayer. I was only rather disappointed not to find a greater number of persons here."

"We are inclined to judge hardly of the poor, in this respect," replied Mr. Sutherland. "It is most difficult to arrange hours for them. The men at work must be in general out of the question. The spirit of the world has encroached upon the Church, and their time is not at their own disposal. But I am happy, even in my small congregation. If others cannot come, we have the satisfaction of thinking we are praying for them; and, if they can, and will not, we are a standing witness to them of their duty; to say nothing of the incalculable comfort to oneself."

"Yes, that I can imagine," said Margaret, thoughtfully.

"And you will imagine it more and more. I

could never have believed how great it might be, if I had not tried it. It is like sleep when one is weary; or water when one is thirsty."

"But are you sure that you are not rather an exception than a rule?" said Margaret.

"No, indeed." Mr. Sutherland spoke with eagerness. "It is a curious fact, which I have watched lately, how the feeling, as well as the practice, of daily public prayer is spreading. Persons whom one meets with casually, without the slightest idea of ostentation, betray, by some slight allusion, the comfort it is to them. In fact, as to ostentation, there can be no more in going to church every day, than there is in doing so on Sunday."

"It certainly is a hopeful sign," observed Margaret.

"Yes, and it is but one amongst very many. Only the English clergy can tell how much there is now doing for the English Church; for they only have any idea of the accumulation of evils which they are labouring to uproot."

"And the courage it must require to undertake this task," said Margaret, "in the large towns, for instance."

"Yet, look at Eastlake. Ten years ago there was one church only; one clergyman, and an evening lecturer; a small neglected school; and the whole parish sunk in poverty and vice. At the present day there are three churches, and a fourth in contemplation; a body of curates working as one man under the rector; schools daily increasing; charitable institutions well supported; and a society of visitors for the poor, who search into all the corners of misery, and bring every case before the notice of the clergy. This has been the improvement of ten years. It certainly is a cause for great faith in the inherent life and power of the English

Church; though the rapid increase of population, and the spread of sectarian and infidel principles, may make one fear the fall of the English nation."

"Then Miss Debrett is not too sanguine in her expectations of what she will find at Eastlake?" said Margaret.

"Personally she may be. I dare say there will be a good many inconveniences and disappointments in store for her, in various ways. All clergymen are not faultless, and all poor people are not grateful, and willing to be taught. Yet, as a specimen of what the Church may do, I know no place more hopeful, if it were only because there have been no very enormous outlays of money; simply the constant, steady perseverance in Church principles. But it is absurd, Margaret, to speak of one place only. I could point out to you twenty parishes at this moment, within my own knowledge, where the improvement has been as great, in as short a space of time."

Margaret was more inclined to believe this than she would have been before, knowing a little of the actual working of the Church system at Alton. She noticed many things as they walked slowly through the village to the cottage, which were indications of Mr. Sutherland's sympathy with and interest in his people, though they consisted only in such little things as a passing word of recognition to an old man hobbling on crutches from the church, an inquiry for a sick child, with a patient listening to a detail of symptoms, and a question as to what progress had been made at the school, to a quiet, dull-looking boy, whom he told Margaret afterwards required particular encouragement. It was very different from all to which she had been accustomed to at Deering; but Mr. Sutherland assured her that, so far, the task of making acquaint-

ance with the poor was an easy one. The difficulty was found when he wished to go deeper. Here he owned that his great hope lay with the children. He tried to make himself their friend; and he had sometimes found that from affection they would speak to him freely of faults which they could not acknowledge to the master, who would be bound to punish them. "But this," he added, "must be quite voluntary, and it seldom goes beyond that quiet talking over of points of character and stumblingblocks, which parents sometimes manage with their children."

"It must make you very happy," said Margaret, "to see every thing improving." She had struck upon a painful chord; yet Mr. Sutherland's self-accusations were too lowly and sincere to be expressed in words. Margaret heard only a half-suppressed sigh, and then, as they had reached the cottage, he left her to rest herself before tea.

Margaret went to bed that night so weary, that she thought it impossible to be awake, and dressed in time for the eight o'clock service the next morning. But, whether it was from the novelty, or from the consciousness that a duty awaited her at a particular hour, she did, to her surprise, contrive to be ready, and without much difficulty, when her uncle came for her. The congregation was larger than in the afternoon; and Margaret saw one or two women bringing in little children, whom they could not have ventured to leave at home. She had imagined the service longer than it really was; and was sorry when it was ended, and she found herself compelled to return again to worldly cares. But the spirit of that first hallowed half hour spread itself over the day. There was something in it beyond the blessing of private prayer; it seemed as if the whole village was consecrated;

as if the services of the few had, in a manner, been accepted for the offerings of the many; and Margaret found herself several times thinking, with a peculiar interest, almost affection, of the different persons who had formed the little congregation.

The arrangements in the cottage were less troublesome on this second day; and Margaret thought it might be possible to return to the Grove the following Monday. She did not like to leave her mother for a longer time, and Mr. Sutherland promised to see all her orders fulfilled; but he wished her to spend a Sunday with him. Margaret would have been happy to have had employment for weeks instead of days, if only she could have remained where she then was. She was almost inclined to regret having come, the return would be so much more distasteful: but Mr. Sutherland would not allow that this was likely to be the case.

"You will find, I think," he said, "that you have a more real perception of the existence of the Church system since you have seen it working, even on such a small scale; and this will give you a sense of union, which will assist you materially when you use the Church prayers; and you must remember that nothing which you see here is an experiment, it is merely the renewing and carrying out of laws which have been permitted to fall into neglect."

Margaret still believed that she should miss the external guidance more than her uncle could imagine, and pictured with something like dread the time when she might be away, not only from him, but from the freedom of her own home, and be compelled to try and carry out Church rules and principles amongst strangers. An hour in the afternoon was spent at the school, for it was the day for the weekly examination. Margaret was more struck with the order, and neatness, and reverent manner

of the children, than with any particular display of knowledge. She saw that her uncle had endeavoured to follow up the idea which he once suggested to her. Their Bibles were used with care, and their hymns repeated slowly and intelligently; and, when Mr. Sutherland reminded them of a festival which fell on the following day, and drew out the particular incidents in the life of the Saint who was to be commemorated, his practical observations were simple enough for the youngest present to understand them. He appeared also to have a personal knowledge of each child, and a peculiar faculty for remembering the family circumstances connected with them; a faculty which he afterwards told Margaret he did not naturally possess, but which he had trained himself to acquire, as one of the safest and best means of becoming their friend. In all this there was little that Margaret could think wonderful; still less, that would be likely to effect sudden and striking results; but she could not but perceive that all that was done was done thoroughly.

"We keep the Saints' days," said Mr. Sutherland, when they left the school, "by giving a half holiday, and making the few lessons which are learnt suitable particularly to the occasion; and I have been trying to impress the principle of the vigils and fast-days likewise; but negatively, rather than positively. If there are treats to be given, those seasons are avoided, and a special prayer is added at the opening and closing of school. Beyond this it may not be wise, and the Church does not require us to go with children."

"And you are not afraid of the imputation of being a Roman Catholic?" inquired Margaret.

"I had much to contend against at first from that cause," replied Mr. Sutherland. "But nothing

is ever gained by concession; yield in one point, and you will be required to yield in others. Stand firm upon the authority of the Church, and not your own individual will, and the world will soon grow weary of molesting you."

"The authority of the Church,"—it was a more definite idea to Margaret then, than it had been for many months—perhaps at all; and when she remarked the frugality of her uncle's table on this day, and his own simple self-denial, she was really willing to believe that a life above the world, a life of saintliness and discipline, might be practised in the English, as well as in the Romish Church.

CHAPTER XL.

The following morning brought a letter, rather to Margaret's surprise. Her mother was not in the habit of writing often, especially during such a short absence; and the first idea which presented itself was, that something must be amiss at the Grove. But the handwriting brought a smile: the characters were straggling and nervous; the "t's" particularly well crossed; and the "i's" so plainly dotted as almost to be blots. "Think of my correspondent being Miss Debrett," said Margaret, holding up the direction for her uncle's inspection; "and a long letter too! What can she have to say?"

"Let me hear," said Mr. Sutherland, laughing, and owning himself very curious; "and leave off when you come to the secrets:" and Margaret, after glancing hastily over the pages, agreed that it would be no breach of confidence, and began:

"My dear Margaret,

"I dare say you will be very much surprised at receiving a letter from me, never having received one before, that I can remember, except the little notes to ask you to drink tea, which you know were not letters; but I asked your dear mother, and she said she thought you would be glad to hear; and she did not mean to write herself, because she is busy with the packing; and when I went over, Symonds and the carpenter were taking down the damask curtains in the dining-room, which are to be sent by the van early on Monday

morning; and your mother hopes, my dear Margaret, that you will give particular directions about their being put up properly, because she thinks they are too long; and she begged me to ask whether Mr. Sutherland could recommend any good, tidy girl, in the village, who would like a day's work, and undertake to shorten them. I dare say there will be no difficulty in this, for I hear all the Alton girls are good workers; and Susan tells me that one of her cousins went to school there, and has since been apprenticed to a dress-maker. But, I hope, my dear, you will not forget, because your mother mentioned it particularly, and I changed my rings on purpose that I might remember. I write this first, that it may be off my mind; but what I meant to tell you about most, was my going over to Eastlake yesterday. Anne Duncan came over by the coach on purpose, and would hire a fly back, for me to return; and that was what made me consent, as I was very busy looking over the boxes in the top shelf of my wardrobe. It turned out to be a good thing, for I was able to take over the china jar which you helped me to pack. My cousin Anne admires your packing extremely, my dear Margaret, and I told her how clever you were, and she said she wished you would come over to Eastlake, which I hope you will do, for she assures me it is only one mile farther than it is from Alton here. You know where my cousin's house is, just past the corner of the High-street, a little to the right up the road, opposite the paling of Mr. De Lancy's place. I forget what the name is. We did not get there till after two, and I was rather tired; for you know, my dear Margaret, I am not used to so much flurry. Anne wished me to stay and sleep; but that, I told her, I could not do, as there was no one at home, and I had brought

nothing with me, except that Susan rode on the box. The reason my cousin wished me to go over was, that I might tell where I should like to have my things put, and see a little about the town; but I think it was rather a mistake, because, being so tired, I went to sleep on the sofa after dinner. However, Anne seemed pleased, and I must say there were some things which I liked very much. The rector, Mr. Henley, called in the afternoon. Anne says he is a very good man indeed, and keeps three curates, and means to have some more. He seemed to be a great friend of Anne's, and was very civil to me. I told him what a poor weak creature I was, and then he said he hoped the place would agree with me. He knew from Anne before that I was her cousin, and was going to live there, and he went on then about my helping her, which of course I should be very glad to do if I knew how. I said how bad my eyes were, and Anne mentioned my flannel work, and Mr. Henley promised I should have some, which I thought remarkably kind, since it could not be expected that a clergyman should know much about flannel work. He and Anne were going to see some poor person, and Anne persuaded me to put on my bonnet and shawl, and go too. I was rather glad I did, though it was not at all a pretty walk, down a back lane. Mr. Henley talked to me a good deal, and Anne told me afterwards that she thinks he means to ask me to undertake to read to a blind woman who lives near. I don't know what to say to it, my own eyes being bad, but I would do any thing for her I could, as I said; and especially, if Mr. Henley liked it. He took my fancy extremely, he was so very attentive. He has no wife, and I could not help thinking, my dear Margaret, what a nice wife you would make for him. My cousin Anne

thinks he is not a marrying man; but that I don't believe. However, I don't mean to put any thing into your head, because nothing might come of it, and it does not do to be looking forward; only it would be very nice to have you settled here. I did not get home that evening till very late, nearly nine o'clock, indeed; but there was a full moon, and I did not so much care as I had expected. The children are very well, and sent you their kind love when I asked them what message I should give you. My cousin Anne thinks that if all the china is packed in the same way as the jar, it will go quite safely. I hope, my dear Margaret, you will not think any thing of what I have said about Mr. Henley, because it might make you unhappy, and I remember your dear mother not liking me to joke about poor Agatha and the Colonel. Mr. Henley is not at all old, and very good-looking, and I dare say he has plenty of money; but Anne Duncan said several times he was not a marrying man. I am sure you must be pleased to be with Mr. Sutherland. Give him my kindest remembrances, and just ask him if he knows any thing about Mr. Henley.

I am, my dear Margaret, with very kind love to yourself, your sincerely attached and most affectionate friend,

"PRISCILLA DEBRETT."

"I am really very fond of my sincerely attached and most affectionate friend," said Margaret, as she concluded the letter: "though I am not at all sure that our leaving the Grove is not by far the best thing that could have happened for her. It is amusing to see how a few kind words have won her heart."

"That I have heard is a great secret of the good

which has been working at Eastlake," said Mr. Sutherland. "It is the fashion to form utopian schemes of Sisters of Charity, — and I am convinced that they would be very desirable, — but until such institutions can be founded, really founded, so as to stand, Henley has seized upon the stray persons in his parish, and set them all to work for him in different ways, and according to rules, which keep them under his own control; and so effects, not equal good, perhaps, but as much as is possible under the circumstances; and this without giving any offence."

"District visitors, in fact," said Margaret.

"Except that, besides the regular persons to act as visitors, he contrives to give every one something to do. Miss Debrett, for instance, is not fitted for a district visitor, but she is fitted to read to an old woman; and this he would perceive, and act upon. I have no doubt he will make her by degrees quite useful."

"All people have not Mr. Henley's discrimination, I am afraid," said Margaret.

"There may be a difficulty, certainly; but caution and practice would teach a good deal, and something of the kind must always be necessary. There are many persons who would never be Sisters of Charity, and yet need definite employment."

Margaret assented, remembering how thankfully she would have placed herself under some such guidance at Deering, instead of trying to find out duties for herself; with the risk of attempting more than she could perform, or neglecting those which lay within her sphere: and Mr. Sutherland engaged when she came to reside in his parish that he would give her full instruction.

Before the close of the day, Margaret had quite finished all that it was in her power to do at the cottage, and was ready for a walk. As yet she had

not enjoyed more than a stroll with her uncle in the vicarage garden, or along the side of the river; but on this, the last evening but one, she was to go with him to see the poor girl whom he had named on the first day of her arrival. Margaret liked the idea, though it made her very melancholy, as recalling thoughts of Henningsley and the Countess. Mr. Sutherland was not surprised to find her silent, and he himself seemed indisposed for conversation, until they came within sight of the farm-house to which they were going, when he said —

"Margaret, I should like you to know something of what I know myself of this young woman; it will give you a greater interest in her, and it is no secret."

"Not under the seal of the confessional," replied Margaret, trying to give her attention, and recall the thoughts which had been dwelling upon dangerous subjects.

"Yet my first real knowledge arose from a confession," replied Mr. Sutherland; but you shall hear. I saw her first about five months since; she had then just come back from service in a bad state of health. Change was recommended, and it was thought it might do her good to stay here with the farmer, who is her uncle, and his wife. They were her nearest relations, for her parents have been dead two or three years. I heard of her, but did not know her state, until I was sent for suddenly one day to see her. They told me she was dying but that was one of the common exaggerations in such cases. I found her very ill; yet there was every prospect of her lingering on for months, and she herself seemed to have no idea that she was at all near her end. She was remarkably quiet in manner, but her spirits, I could see, were very much depressed. She seemed to be very well dis-

posed, and talked to me without hesitation upon religious subjects, and was pleased when I offered to read to, and pray with her. Her aunt's account of her was, that she was very silent, but grateful for all that was done; and I learnt that this had been her general character, as far as it was known in the village; but she was not a native of the place."

"That is like Rhoda," said Margaret.

"I think it must be. In other points I can imagine a still greater resemblance. This poor girl, Esther Stevens, would scarcely have been so interesting at first to you, though I own she was to me. I fancied I perceived traces of a superior intellect and disposition; and her very quietness gave me an additional reason for wishing to know more of her; and I managed it at last. I had visited her for a short time, and found her always glad to see me, and willing to listen to whatever I said, and to do what I advised, except in one instance; she would not receive the Holy Communion. She told me that she had been a communicant formerly; but why she had left off the practice, or why she hesitated, I could not find out. I offered to go through the service with her, and to explain it, thinking there might be some false views which stood in the way. She seemed quite inclined that I should do this, — at least she made no objection; but we never went farther than the first exhortation. When I spoke to her of the difficulties which often stood in people's way, and the necessity of gaining some help in them, by applying to a clergyman, and then went on to urge the importance of confession, when any offence was weighing upon the conscience, and to open the doctrine of the Church upon the subject of absolution, I found that I had touched the vulnerable point. She showed evident agita-

tion, and, after much difficulty, acknowledged that it was the recollection of a particular sin which kept her from the Holy Communion. Now, of course, Margaret," continued Mr. Sutherland, "under ordinary circumstances, an avowal made to a clergyman is strictly secret; but Esther has allowed me to mention this (which is no case of a great crime, such as is generally so called), that it might be a warning to others; and she has, I know, spoken of it herself. It was an act of wilfulness against her mother's advice. She was anxious to go to service, but could not find any place to suit her, when an acquaintance in London proposed that she should accept of a situation which was vacant there. The mother knew very little of the young woman, and dreading her daughter's going into such a scene of temptation, naturally set her face decidedly against it. But Esther was resolved, and, without her mother's knowledge, set off. She offered herself at the place named, and was accepted; and though there were a great many trials, she bore up against them all, and conducted herself extremely well; but the suspense and anxiety caused by her absence worked upon her mother's constitution, which was naturally weak, and brought on a serious illness, from which she never recovered. From that time Esther was miserable, and long thought her offence unpardonable. Yet she had strong religious impressions, and they were her safeguard against many evils. She did at last bring herself sometimes to hope for forgiveness; but she could never persuade herself that she was worthy to receive the Holy Communion, though it was a blessing which, of all others, she desired; and she might even have died without it, if I had not brought her to confession, and, as a consequence, seeing that she was

thoroughly penitent, to absolution also. Since then, you may imagine, she has depended upon me in no ordinary manner. If I had allowed it, she would have put herself into my hands to be guided implicitly."

"But that you would not allow?" said Margaret, half-inquiringly.

"No, because I am sure it is not right, and was never intended. To possess such unlimited control over any human being, implies a degree of knowledge of the heart which it is not in the power of one person in a thousand to attain; and which, if attained, can scarcely be exercised without great danger to both parties. Guidance and instruction I gave to the utmost; but when I found that Esther was willing to consult me in every thing, I imperceptibly drew back, and threw her more upon herself, and managed even for her to be sent away for a little time to another relation. I think now she looks to me as much, and no more, than she ought."

Mr. Sutherland had scarcely finished speaking, when they stood before the gate leading into the smooth plot of grass, surrounded by a low stone wall, which fronted the farm-house. Mr. Sutherland's approach had been perceived, and Margaret was pleased at the cordial feeling which welcomed him. He seemed as much at home now in questions of the dairy and the pigs, as in matters of Scripture and Church history with the school children; and Margaret could not detect any symptoms of absence of mind, even when Mrs. Stevens entered most particularly into the details of her domestic economy. Yet he stopped her, as soon as he could, consistently with kindness, and turned the conversation to her niece. Margaret knew all the fearful symptoms by heart. If she had closed her eyes, and carried back

her memory to other scenes, she could almost have supposed that she was listening to the history of poor Rhoda's sufferings.

"You will see her now, sir, I suppose," said the farmer's wife, when Mr. Sutherland inquired whewhether Esther was in the next room. "She is not down stairs to-day; her cough is so troublesome.

"I will ask her, if she would like you to go up, Margaret," said Mr. Sutherland. "I dare say she will; as it rather pleases her to see people."

He left the room with Mrs. Stevens, and Margaret amused herself with the prints hanging on the wall, and the mixture of ancient simplicity, and modern finery, which is perceptible in many of our English farm-houses. She thought of her uncle's conversation; it seemed as if it had been specially intended for her benefit; to settle her mind. Probably it was, for he seldom spoke without some motive, and Margaret was grateful to him, though she could not yet satisfy herself that very minute direction in matters of conduct was likely to prove an evil rather than a good. It was some time before the farmer's wife re-appeared, and then she said that Mr. Sutherland was going to read to her niece, and had begged her in the mean time to take Miss Percival round the garden. Margaret heard the earnest solemn tones of her uncle's voice in the room above, and a casual remark which she made, in consequence, brought a full history of all his kindness and goodness from her companion. It was no surprise to hear Mr. Sutherland mentioned with gratitude; but Margaret was not prepared for the little instances of consideration which were brought forward; the thoughtfulness, which could attend to the very least particulars for the poor girl's comfort. Yet all was nothing, Mrs. Stevens said, when compared

with the comfort he had been to her niece's mind. After talking to him, she seemed like a different creature.

"Clergymen take a great deal of pains in these days, ma'am," was her concluding remark, as she led the way back to the house, after exhibiting all that she considered worthy of notice in the garden and farm-yard.

Margaret was not able to enter farther into the merits of the clergy, for Mr. Sutherland came to take her up-stairs; but there was an impression left upon her mind — one which could never have been made at Deering. It was a large airy room which Margaret entered, lighted by latticed windows, looking into the square garden. The walls were whitewashed, and the floor was uncarpeted; but the few articles of furniture; a four-post bed, an old carved oak chest and table, some high-backed chairs, and a cumbrous sofa covered with white dimity, gave it an appearance of comfort. The sick girl herself was cheerful, and seemed better than Margaret had expected. She was very different from Rhoda, older and more subdued, with a quiet intelligent eye, and a very gentle expression of the mouth. She had not yet reached the most distressing stage of her complaint, and the little excitement of seeing Margaret and Mr. Sutherland had made her eyes sparkle with pleasure. Margaret could scarcely believe how ill she was, even when she put the ordinary questions, and received answers, which she had learnt to interpret fatally; but Mr. Sutherland's manner shewed a full persuasion of her danger, and Esther alluded to her own state in a tone which admitted no doubt of her conviction that death was inevitable. The scene was not what Margaret had imagined. It was more bright and hopeful; more suited to the flowers

which ornamented the mantel-piece, and the gladdening sounds of the birds that were singing in the garden, and the insects which buzzed upon the window. A little round table stood by the sofa, and upon it rested the Bible, from which Mr. Sutherland had been reading, open at the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John. Esther pointed to it as Mr. Sutherland rose, and said he would leave his niece with her.

"I shall read it over again, sir, when you are gone," she remarked, with a smile of peculiar sweetness.

"You will find comfort in it, I am sure," he replied; "and it will interest you, if you are able to find out the passages in which Heaven is spoken of, and put them together, and so form some more certain idea, if possible, than you now have."

An expression of great awe stole over the countenance of the dying girl; and when Mr. Sutherland took her hand, and gave her his parting blessing, she said, —

"And you really think that I may hope for it?"

"Hope is our duty, Esther, as well as our blessing, when it is a hope rightly founded. If the dark hour, as you call it, comes again, turn to the texts which I have marked, and remember that we have every reason to put faith in our Lord's promise, that the pardon which is granted by His ministers here, upon true repentance, is confirmed by Him in heaven."

Esther retained his hand for a moment, whilst she thanked him for this and his many kindnesses, and with a slight blush offered him a few flowers which she said had been gathered on purpose for him, because they were his favourites. Margaret wished that her uncle had remained, for she could not quite overcome her natural shyness at being left alone

with a stranger; but illness soon breaks down the barrier of reserve, and Mr. Sutherland's niece came with a passport to the sick girl's heart, which made her receive every word of sympathy with more than common thankfulness. It seemed a pleasure to be able to tell of his goodness, and Margaret led her on by degrees to speak of herself. The cloud which had previously settled upon her when Mr. Sutherland was taking his leave, returned again as Margaret alluded to the tremendous change that awaits every human being, and remarked how difficult it was to conceive really what the near approach of such an hour must be. She covered her eyes for a moment, and Margaret thought that she trembled; but when she looked up, her face was tranquil as before.

"You will be happier than I can be, Miss Percival," she said, earnestly; "for you can never have all to answer for which I have."

"It will be fearful for the best," replied Margaret; "May God have mercy on us both!"

"And He will have mercy," continued Esther: "it is written in the Bible, as Mr. Sutherland has taught me to see; and that is what I rest upon, when I am frightened."

"And are you often frightened?" asked Margaret, without hesitation.

"Sometimes, now. At one time I was always; but I have been led to think about our Lord and all His sufferings, and that they were borne to save us; and I can trust to Him; and when I have no faith, I pray and read of Him, and my fear goes away. But I have been very wicked."

"And you are going to do as my uncle advised," she said, "put together the passages which speak of Heaven?"

"Mr. Sutherland thinks it will be a good thing,"

replied Esther. "He says I shall understand better then what a great difference there is between the trouble here, and the rest there."

"Yes," said Margaret; "we cannot well feel now, what it will be to be at rest."

"I can feel it a little, I hope, Miss Percival. "Perhaps you will, when you come to be as near your end as I am. It is the thought of our Saviour which gives it. I can hope now, and the pain I have to bear seems not like a punishment; but like mercy, because it was what our Saviour had to bear too."

"I have had very little pain of body," said Margaret, "and I am afraid I should find it very difficult to be patient."

"Not with the Bible," replied Esther, drawing the book towards her, and turning to the concluding chapters of one of the Gospels. "That is what I make my aunt, or one of her children, read to me," she said, "when I am worst; and sometimes the pain itself makes me happy; it is like sharing a friend's troubles. He is my friend," she added, clasping her wasted hands, "for He has sent me all I need."

Margaret's eyes glistened, and a pang of conscience suggested the question, whether she had ever realized as fully the actual fellowship with her Lord and Master, which could thus make all suffering light for His sake. Her uncle's voice summoned her down stairs, and the poor girl seemed disappointed; especially so, when she learnt that Margaret would not now remain at Alton.

"It was very kind in any one," she said, "to come and see a sick girl like her, and very nice to have a visit from any friend of Mr. Sutherland's. I hope you will pray for me, Miss Percival, that I

may love my Saviour as I ought," were her last words; "and may He bless you, and make you happy!"

Margaret rejoined her uncle, and walked home in silence. She was thinking, not of him, nor of the dying girl, nor even of herself; but of One —"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, who is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him."

Margaret enjoyed that evening a sense of confidence and security in the Church of her fathers, to which for months she had been a stranger. She had now actually seen what before seemed only a theory; and although Mr. Sutherland's arguments as to the guilt of schism could, in strict truth, neither be strengthened nor lessened by the working of the Church, Margaret was still too much under the influence of imagination to be insensible to that which she saw around her. If she had continued at Deering, there might have been seasons when the temptations of Romanism would have been almost more than she could withstand. But there was now a safeguard provided. Whatever might be the power of the Romish Church, it was certain that the English Church possessed power also. Holiness could be met by holiness; zeal by zeal; self-denial by self-denial; and this not in one place only, but wherever the principles of the Church were carried out. And when the tone of mind which such principles were calculated to produce, was sought, it was found in the penitence, and faith, and love which had been witnessed in the suffering girl whose life seemed already hidden with her Lord. To follow Him, to trust in Him, to rejoice in being a partaker of His cross here, in the hope of receiving the fulness of His joy hereafter: could there be

a higher motive for action, or a surer support in affliction?

On the succeeding day, and in the quietness of the early morning, Margaret, one of a very small congregation, received the Holy Communion from her uncle's hands. How deep and fervent was the vow then made against yielding to temptation, the eye of God alone could see; but Mr. Sutherland, as he watched the tone of Margaret's conversation in the hours which followed — its quiet cheerfulness, charity, hopefulness, and humility — saw reason to trust that the reward of her great sacrifice had, at length, been in some measure granted; and that her hitherto wavering faith was strengthened to meet whatever trials might still be in store for her.

CHAPTER XLI.

Margaret's life of tranquillity was to end the next day; but she could think of this with comparatively little regret, in the prospect of soon returning to remain at Alton for weeks, possibly even for years. If she could have contemplated the latter as a probability, the change in her life would have been robbed of more than half its sorrow. A residence in her uncle's parish, in the enjoyment of Church services and privileges, with occupation at home amongst the children, and abroad in the parish, offered every thing most likely to restore her peace of mind; and had the idea been presented to her before her late experience of grief, she might have called it happiness. Still she trusted no less that in time it might be so, if only she could forget the Countess Novera. But it would not do to speculate upon what might be her lot in after years. At the present moment, all the strength of her mind was required to bear the sacrifice which she was willing to impose upon herself, so as not to allow any one to imagine how great it really was. Margaret found her mother, on her arrival at the Grove, fully engaged. Her own absence had been of use in this respect, for it had obliged Mrs. Percival to resume more of her former habits, and in compliance with Mr. Sutherland's wishes, much had been done to hasten the departure from the Grove. Now that Alton was in a state of preparation, a day or two would enable the whole family to remove there.

Margaret was more satisfied with the general prospects when she began to think them over. She believed that her mother would, ere long, recover her cheerfulness, and the children would be happy in any place; and she was learning herself to live in, and for others. If she could see smiles on the countenances of those she loved, she could keep her own sighs hidden from observation. Yet, remarks occasionally fell from her mother, which she would have given much to have been spared. One in particular, on the day of her return, fixed itself in her mind. It was on the disappointment which parents are doomed to meet with in regard to their children's path in life. Margaret perceived, from the look which accompanied it, that, although it was spoken generally, it was meant for her. However she might strive to bear up herself, it seemed impossible to avoid causing her mother vexation, unless she relinquished her plans.

The last day at the Grove was not what might have been expected; in fact it was not a last day, for some of the family would be there frequently again, to give final orders; and Margaret was surprised to find how much the previous removal of the furniture mitigated her regret. Half her home seemed gone before her; but there was a parting, which, upon leaving the Grove, would be final. At Alton there would be no associations with Henningsley. How precious these were, Margaret could now fully tell. They were brought before her continually; even when most occupied, she could not resist the temptation of lingering at the window from which the hill above the house could be seen. It was possible, just possible, that the Countess might be there. Lucia's report might have been a mistake, or it might have been misunderstood. Whilst remaining so near Henningsley,

there seemed a chance that something might bring them together. On the following day, they would be quite removed from the opportunity of a casual meeting; and for any other — Margaret endeavoured to persuade herself that she had given up all hope of it. But the faint expectation lingered in her mind, and she indulged it. For this one day it seemed innocent to remember, and even strive to recall by-gone hours. There would be nothing to induce her to do so at Alton; there all would be new, and the past might be as if it had never been. Agatha called in the course of the afternoon. She was quiet in manner, and said very little of herself; and Margaret knew her too well to force the subject. She saw that her sister was subdued, and perhaps that was the best state of mind in which she could be. Cheerfulness would, under the circumstances, have been misplaced. They bade each other good-bye with the expressed hope of still being frequently together. Agatha's pride would not venture an allusion to Margaret's plans, and Margaret carefully abstained from mentioning them, except that once, when Agatha wished that she had the means of doing all which Colonel Clive might do, Margaret stopped her, and said that if it had been possible for her to have undertaken such a serious change as George's college education, they would at once have applied to her; but with regard to Colonel Clive, she would agree with them, that it would be unfair, in fact, impossible, to expect it; the obligation, if incurred, could not be repaid. Margaret hoped by the remark to put an end to any notion which Agatha might have of appealing to her husband in favour of George; but Agatha had never really entertained the thought. She had had more experience with Colonel Clive in money affairs than Margaret, and knew well that

they were forbidden ground, if she wished to remain at peace with him.

It was late when Agatha left the Grove, and Margaret went then to pay her parting visit to Miss Debrett; afterwards, she thought, that it might be allowable to walk on a little way on the road to Henningsley; perhaps to the Lodge gate. If it had not been for the idea, retained in spite of herself, that the Countess might be there, she would possibly have been tempted to enter the park. The fact could be learnt at the Lodge; but Margaret, upon consideration, did not like to be long absent from her mother. She even questioned whether it would be right to walk at all. But it was for the last time, and she had worked very hard, and Mrs. Percival knew that she was going out, and made no objection; and her conscience being satisfied, she set off.

Miss Debrett's visit was hastened over. It was a sorrowful one. Neither the preparations for the change, nor the occupation of giving orders, nor the cheering prospect of her life at Eastlake, with a kind constant companion, and useful occupation, and other great advantages, could, at the moment, divert her mind from the grief of parting from her dear friends. They were very dear; dearer within the last two years, since Margaret had learnt to practise Christian thoughtfulness, and charity, than they had ever been before. Miss Debrett placed her thin hands upon Margaret's face, and looked steadfastly at her, and said, whilst tears streamed down her cheeks,— "I shall never find any one anywhere like you, my dear."

"Only a great many better and kinder," said Margaret, trying not to be sorrowful also.

"No, my dear, none. You were always ready, — close at hand, and you did not mind the weather. And your mother and the children! poor little pets!

you will be sure and send them over by and by. I found a little china dog in my closet this afternoon, which I must give to Juliet."

Margaret seized upon the idea, and declared that Juliet would be delighted; and Miss Debrett, pleased with herself for the thought, went on to detail the history of the china dog, and at length grew so interested, that Margaret managed to bring in her last words without causing any violent paroxysm of grief; and they separated with a half promise from Margaret that her mother would see Miss Debrett in the evening, and a hope that they might possibly meet again before she left the Grove the following morning.

Once more at liberty, and wrapt in her own thoughts, Margaret, as if by instinct, took the road to Henningsley. It was the high road along which she had to pass, — the London road; and carriages and horses, riders and pedestrians, went by in quick succession. One or two of her acquaintances bowed; and Mr. Prior stopped his open phaeton to inquire for the family, and Mr. Harrison alighted for a minute from his horse, to ask if it was really true that they were going the next day. The world was pursuing its ordinary course, and Margaret, to all appearance, went with it. She answered the questions addressed to her, and made inquiries in return; bowed when politeness demanded it, and had her senses sufficiently awake to keep her out of the reach of danger. Yet all the time she was as one walking and acting in a dream. About half a mile from the town, the road to Henningsley branched off to the right. It was then but a little distance to the Lodge, and just beyond was the cottage which had been occupied by Rhoda Newbolt. Margaret looked at her watch, and saw that it was growing late; but she had a longing desire to

go on a little further, that she might once more look upon the garden, before which she had stood, almost in fear, when she first visited poor Rhoda; and mark the path which Father Andrea had taken across the park; and recall — but no, Margaret would not recall conversations; even though she then felt strong, she dared not; for she knew that it was tampering with her faith. The cottage was now empty. The flower-beds were overgrown with weeds, and grass grew over the narrow walks. Rhoda's family had left it about six months after her death, and since that time it had not been let. The Countess would not admit any one as her tenant who was not a member of the Romish Church. Margaret beheld in it a type of the desolation which had spread over her own hopes. There was nothing to make her personally regret that the place should be neglected; yet it increased her sadness. She looked over the palings into the park; all was still and deserted. The deer were feeding peacefully under the spreading oaks, fearless of being disturbed by the foot of man; for no sound, even of the wood-cutter's axe, broke upon the mournful silence, and the note of a solitary wood-pigeon alone gave a voice to those memories of years gone by, which filled the quietness of the evening hour. Margaret drew near an opening in the trees at the side of the road, from which the house could be seen. It stood prominently forward in the centre of the park, backed by the dark wooded hill. The stone balustrade which ran along the terrace was clearly marked, for the sunlight was touching the building with golden rays, and the grotesque towers glittered in a flood of light. Margaret was dazzled by their brilliancy; yet she gazed still. It was hard to look for the last time. A carriage drove down the road; but she did not care to mark it; there was

nothing for her at that instant in the whole world, except the remembrance of Beatrice. The sound unexpectedly ceased, and Margaret turned to see the cause. A heavy, rather cumbrous, foreign-looking carriage it was, waiting at the Lodge gate; two servants in livery behind.

Why was Margaret's cheek so deadly pale? and why did she cling to the paling to support herself? The Lodge keeper appeared, and the iron gates were swung open; but before the carriage had entered the park, Margaret had seen Father Andrea's face, as he leant out of the window, and she could almost have imagined that he had seen her. She stood transfixed to the spot; then an impulse of shame made her long to rush away; but her head was giddy, and her limbs trembled. She sat down on the bank, trying to recover herself. The carriage rolled on a little way through the park, and Margaret, without seeing, knew exactly how far it must have gone. Before it could have reached the foot of the hill, on which the house stood, it stopped again. It was but for a minute, however, and Margaret heard the sound grow fainter and fainter, till at length, as the road wound round the other side of the hill, it died completely away. She stood up, intending to walk home; but just as she was moving from the spot, a voice arrested her progress.

"Surely I cannot be mistaken. I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Percival." Father Andrea approached with an air of the deepest respect; but Margaret was so taken by surprise that she could not find words to return the greeting. The confessor went round towards the gate, and as she met him there, he held it open for her to enter. That was not the moment to draw back; but Margaret did hesitate, and Father Andrea perceiving it, quickly explained, as they walked on, the reason

of his arrival. "The Countess was with him," he said; "she had been extremely ill, — she was very ill at that time, — but she could not be persuaded to remain longer in London, her anxiety was so great to see Miss Percival."

"To see me!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Yes; do you think it could be otherwise, after my explanation?"

"I did not know you could make one; at least not one which would be satisfactory as regarded the letter," replied Margaret.

"I ought to have written to you," he said; "but my time and thoughts were distressingly occupied; and I believed that the Countess would have seen you before any intelligence could have reached you from me. I will not, however, waste time in making excuses for myself: I think you will easily overlook any suspense I may have unintentionally caused you; and you have a greater call than this upon your forgiveness." He then related, as briefly as possible, the circumstances of Lucia's temptation, and the act into which she had been betrayed, speaking of it openly, and in strong language of condemnation; yet striving, at the same time, to inculcate charity in the judgment that might be passed upon her by those who had never been exposed to a similar trial.

Margaret was shocked more than indignant. Her mind was, like the Countess's, grieved rather at Lucia's guilt, than her own wrongs. She could not entertain anger towards her, when the first account of her treachery was received at the same time that a way to a reconciliation with Beatrice was opened. She said this to Father Andrea, and he seemed satisfied. He had feared that her strict English sense of honour, her coldness when compared with Lucia's passionate temperament,

might lead her to censure more harshly. The word reconciliation he would not allow her to use, except as regarded herself.

"The Countess," he said, "required no reconciliation; when the circumstances connected with their former parting had been explained, all was clear to her. She was then conscious of having been in fault, and sought only for Margaret's forgiveness. A week before she would have been with you," continued the confessor, "but she was taken alarmingly ill. You will find her much altered; very much," he repeated slowly, and more emphatically, as if to prepare Margaret for the interview.

Margaret heard what he said, and, in a certain degree, comprehended the sense. She knew that it was something which gave her great pain; but her real thoughts were in another direction. This meeting, which she had so earnestly desired, could not be justified to her conscience, unless it were clearly understood to be the last; and not only the last as regarded their personal intercourse,—that might necessarily be imagined, when she was about to leave the Grove,—but the last communication which they could ever have. Neither message nor letter must from henceforth pass between them. When they had ascended the hill, and Father Andrea was about to open the little gate into the shrubbery which joined the terrace, Margaret stopped him. It was right that he should know her determination beforehand.

"You must hearken to me," she said, "before we go further. You have brought me here with the idea of seeing the Countess; but can you answer for the effect the meeting will have upon her?"

"It will be better than delay. She has been living upon the thoughts of it. Her mind is wound

up to a great pitch of excitement, and I could not take upon myself to disappoint her."

He was walking on again; but Margaret prevented him from proceeding. —"I do not think you clearly understand," she said, in a timid voice; "if I see Beatrice once more, it must be only once. It can never be again. I am resolved, as I was when I wrote."

The confessor's countenance slightly darkened; but the tone of his reply was indifferent. "We must talk of this at another time. I can think now only of the Countess's anxiety; and that you may not be hurried, I will send a messenger to the Grove to say that you are here, and the carriage shall take you home by and by."

"But it must wait for me now; indeed, I cannot stay long," exclaimed Margaret, seeing that the confessor's intention evidently was to detain her for the evening.

"We will see," was the answer in the same indifferent manner; "it shall be entirely as you wish. The carriage shall not be put up until you yourself give the order."

Margaret was secretly annoyed, for it seemed as if Father Andrea doubted the strength of her resolution. Yet she could not retain even that momentary irritation against him, when, as they emerged from the shrubbery upon the elevated terrace, and their eyes rested upon the rich landscape which lay beneath them, bathed in the lustre of the setting sun, he resumed his natural style, and said fervently, as if giving vent to a sudden impulse,—"God is merciful, and would teach us truths at all times. His light falls cloudlessly and gloriously upon the earth, yet it is but the type of that more perfect light which the Church sheds upon her faithful children."

Margaret was startled at this abrupt allusion to a

subject upon which she had trusted he would deem it useless again to enter; but Father Andrea's purpose was answered. He had impressed her with the conviction that, although she might forget religion for an earthly affection, it could never be so with him; and the presence of a constant, deep, unwavering principle of devotion is above all others an instrument of influence over the human mind. They passed in front of the drawing-room window; but the Countess was not there. Her maid met them when they entered the hall, and said that her mistress was in the boudoir. She was very much fatigued, and had wished to be alone; but doubtless she would see Miss Percival. Lauretta looked at Margaret as she spoke with a smile of satisfaction. The Countess had formerly been cheered and tranquillised by her visits, and so she flattered herself it would be now. Margaret drew back, and made Father Andrea lead the way. The confessor's step was slow, and his manner thoughtful, and he stopped at the head of the staircase, and said again, "You will find her much altered,—and remember, excitement of all kinds must be avoided as much as possible." It was a curious warning to give at such a moment, when he had just brought them together; but it was not without its meaning. He knocked gently at the door of the Countess's apartment, and Margaret withdrew instinctively behind him. The summons was in a moment answered, and the confessor entered alone. Beatrice sprang from the sofa on which she had been compelled from utter exhaustion to lie down, and Margaret's name escaped her lips. The look of disappointment which accompanied the words went to the confessor's heart, and without answering, he signed to Margaret to approach, and then left the room. There was but an instant's delay, and then the Countess's lovely fea-

tures were lighted up with intensity of pleasure; and as they met in the doorway, the long fervent embrace told that the word reconciliation was neither remembered nor required by either. Margaret's thrill of delight was interrupted by her earnest gaze upon the face she loved. The few weeks of absence had indeed worked a fearful change. Margaret looked but once, and her heart died within her. The Countess saw that she was shocked, and adverted to the weariness of the long journey; and immediately recalling the past, and longing to ease the burden upon her heart, she said, "Margaret, you, too, have suffered; can you forgive me?" It was an entreaty which Margaret did not require. She had no consciousness of any thing to forgive. Who could behold that bright pure face softly shadowed by the spiritual beauty of a better world, and think of aught but holiness and love? Yet Beatrice insisted that she had much to acknowledge and lament. Hastiness, distrust, pride, she could not be happy until she had confessed it; and the extenuation which was at hand — Lucia's insinuations and treachery, were untouched upon. Margaret listened eagerly, not because she wished to be convinced that the affection of Beatrice was restored, but because each word that was spoken, each smile that passed over her countenance, was light and gladness to her heart. Light—but to be followed only by a deeper darkness. Margaret yielded to this long-desired happiness, whilst the Countess spoke; but when she ended with,—"And now, dearest, let me, if I may, hear from your own lips the true history of all which Father Andrea has reported," the charm was broken. It was no longer the meeting, but the parting, which was before her. "Oh, Beatrice," she said, "Father Andrea has spared me much, much pain. You must know the

trial which lies before us. God give us strength to bear it!"

The Countess looked at her incredulously. "Margaret, you are deceiving yourself," she said. "Your tenderness of conscience is misleading you. In a moment of suffering you may have believed that it was right to turn away from the truth; but that time is over. Now that we have been permitted to meet, and that Father Andrea is here to explain all difficulties, we shall be together, at least for a season, and your scruples will vanish."

"No, Beatrice, impossible! To-morrow I leave my home for ever."

The Countess repeated the word "to-morrow" in a tone of abstraction. She turned to seek for Father Andrea. "It is strange — I never heard," she began, whilst trying to rise, that she might reach the bell.

Margaret saw her weakness, and moved instead; and as she sat down again the Countess caught her hand, and said, in a hollow voice, "Margaret, you cannot be cruel."

"To you! — but, Beatrice, I must not tempt myself."

"Oh! listen, listen, Margaret;" and Beatrice grasped her fingers nervously and eagerly. "I am ignorant and sinful, and cannot teach you; but Father Andrea is wise, wiser than my tongue can tell, and he will prove it all. He can place it beyond doubt. And it is salvation; think, Margaret, think, it is salvation."

Margaret paused, and offered an inward prayer for strength to assist her in the struggle; and before she could reply, the servant was in attendance at the door, and the Countess, in a feeble voice, ordered that the confessor should be requested to come to her immediately. She did not attempt to continue

the conversation, and Margaret, unwilling to exhaust her, waited in silence. Father Andrea's step was heard approaching through the long passages, and the Countess listened to it with evident impatience. She would have addressed him as he entered; but turning to Margaret, he said, "Miss Percival, the carriage waits only your orders to be put up."

"Let it go," exclaimed the Countess, in a voice of suppressed agony, whilst she held Margaret's dress, as if fearful that she would in that moment escape her. Margaret looked at her gratefully and fondly, but her voice and manner were unshaken as she answered —

"Nay, dearest Beatrice, that must not be. If it may be delayed but for a few minutes longer, I must be satisfied."

"Speak to her, father," said the Countess, her voice becoming suddenly quite calm.

"I would speak," replied the confessor, "if I thought that my words would be of any avail; but Miss Percival has, doubtless, already weighed the cost. She knows even as we know of what profit it will be to gain the whole world, and lose her own soul."

"Father," answered Margaret, meekly, — "there is nothing for me to gain, by remaining as I now am, except toil and suffering."

"And the support and affection of your friends, daughter," replied the confessor. "You are mistaken if you imagine that you are deciding in this case without reference to them."

"I am deciding," replied Margaret, "according to the best of my judgment, as far as weakness and ignorance will allow. If affection alone could influence me, God knows where my heart would lead me."

She turned to the Countess, and Beatrice lifted the hand which rested in her lap, and pressed it to her lips. There was silence, and then Father Andrea's voice was heard in the abrupt yet solemn tone which in a moment fixed the attention of his hearers.

"'See, I have set before thee, this day, life and death, and good and evil: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.' Daughter, I ask you not to choose but to inquire."

Margaret felt the eager gaze, which the Countess fixed upon her, though she did not venture to look at her. "I must not listen to you," she said; "I have been warned: and if I now act in the face of warning, the guilt must be my own."

"And who has dared to warn? Who has shut the gates of the city of truth, and forbidden you to enter?" inquired the confessor, indignantly.

"My uncle, and my own conscience," replied Margaret. "Yes, Beatrice," she added, appealing to the Countess, who, on the mention of Mr. Sutherland, had involuntarily withdrawn her hand; "I have followed him, rather than Father Andrea, because I dare not go out of the way to consult a guide after my own choice. I cannot yet deny that the English Church is a true branch of the Catholic Church. Until that is proved, I am bound to adhere to her."

"And the arguments, which are to show that she is apostate, will never then reach your ear," said Father Andrea.

Margaret's distress was increasing every moment. In the conflict of feeling, her head grew almost bewildered; and the rules, by which Mr. Sutherland had directed her, became uncertain. Father Andrea perceived that he had gained an advantage. "Daughter," he said, "I have no wish to hasten your

convictions. If we must part, though I hope to persuade you that parting is unnecessary, let it at least be with the promise, that you will at your leisure consider this subject more carefully. Whatever books you may require for instruction shall be supplied you; and, if I might venture to offer it, my own explanation and advice shall ever be at your service."

"Yes," exclaimed the Countess; "he is right. "You will and must inquire; promise it, — oh, Margaret, promise it." There was no reply, and Margaret stood apparently undecided. "Promise it," once more repeated the Countess; but Margaret's thoughts had travelled to Alton, to her uncle, the solemn services of the Church, the self-dedication at the altar, the vow that she would avoid the path of temptation — and she was firm. "Beatrice," she said, "I dare not promise any thing. According to the light which is given me, so must I act, my first duty is with my own Church."

"Which you accept upon your own authority," said Father Andrea, impatiently.

"No," replied Margaret; "the voice of my teachers is declared to be the voice of antiquity, and I cannot contradict it by the inspired Word of God. In forsaking them, I am told I must risk the guilt of schism."

"You shall not forsake them," replied the Countess, imploringly. "You shall but seek further concerning their authority."

"But not of you, Beatrice, nor of Father Andrea. My guides must be those whom God has appointed me; or, in the weakness of my heart, I may be led into fearful error."

"You are not just to yourself," said the Countess, in a changed tone, which had in it something of severity. "You have no weakness."

"Beatrice," exclaimed Margaret, eagerly, "never never did you utter a more mistaken word. Yes, I have a weakness, and even you cannot tell how great it is. It bids me leave my mother, my family, my home, all that has been dear to me, and throw myself within reach of a temptation, against which one, who now stands in the place of a father, has solemnly warned me."

The Countess threw her arms round Margaret's waist, and then rested her head upon her hand in the deepest melancholy. Father Andrea remained immoveably silent, with his eyes fixed on Margaret, awaiting her next words. She rose from her seat, for she dared not trust her resolution longer.

"Beatrice," she said, and paused. The Countess looked up. There was a wild, wandering expression in her glance. "Beatrice, dearest! It is come at length; we must part."

"Part! who speaks of parting?" and the Countess's head was again buried in her hands.

"To-morrow, I have said, I must leave the home of my childhood," said Margaret. "My life will soon be strange and sorrowful. Will you not sometimes think of me?"

Beatrice glanced at Father Andrea, as if expecting him again to interfere; but Margaret continued quickly —

"There is care and trial before me, dearest Beatrice. It would comfort me to know that you could feel for me. If all things continue in their present state, I may soon be living among strangers, as a dependent, working for my daily bread."

"Never; never!" exclaimed the Countess.

"But it must be; there is no hope, and I do not murmur. My lot has been blest hitherto, and doubtless it will be still. It was not pity that I asked."

"Pity!" said the Countess, raising her brilliant eyes to Margaret's. "Pity for you!"

"Yet I might deserve it. Beatrice, your love for me would make me proud."

"Stay!" said the Countess, in a quick voice; "Margaret, come near, quite near, that I may speak;" and, as she laid her head back on the pillow, Margaret knelt by her, and kissed her, and smoothed the dark silky hair, which was braided across her pallid brow. "I heard it all before," she said, beginning faintly. "Father Andrea told me; but it will never be. Margaret, I came, I made him bring me, that you may be saved — from that, from every thing. They say that I must return, that I cannot live in England; and we will go, — yes, we will go together to the bright sunny land, and there we shall be happy once more."

"Daughter," said the confessor, as he marked the rising tones of her sweet voice, "you must trust to me to explain your wishes."

"No," replied the Countess, with greater calmness; "none other but myself, father. Trust me," and she looked up at him with a meaning smile,— "trust me, I will be careful."

"But indeed, Beatrice, you have misunderstood," replied Margaret, painfully perplexed by the mixture of incoherence and earnestness in the Countess's manner. "It is as I have said; to-morrow I must leave the Grove; and soon I must, if my mother's consent can be obtained, exert myself as a governess for a few years, that I may be enabled to maintain my brother at college. These are the true circumstances; and even if no other causes existed, these alone would be sufficient to separate us."

"To unite us, rather," said the Countess; her eager, hopeful spirit, excited to the utmost by the fever which was burning in her veins. "Margaret,

you will go with me. Nay, listen," she continued, observing that Margaret would again have insisted upon the impossibility, — "you will go with me, and it shall be as you will. If your heart is bent upon aiding your brother, it shall be done; better far in Italy than in England. Say but the word."

Margaret still looked perplexed; and Father Andrea, seeing that the Countess had already exerted herself too much, interrupted her before she could proceed.

"The Countess has told you what is really the case," he said. "If you are thus resolved upon sacrificing yourself for your family, an opportunity has offered itself by which you may serve your own views, and be of incalculable comfort to others. Lady Anstruther is going to Italy; but in the winter she will, with the Countess, inhabit the Palazzo Novera. If, although holding the position of the Countess's friend, you would eventually undertake the charge of Lady Anstruther's only child, you would be able to assist your brother to the full extent of your wishes; and the Countess Novera would then be blest, as fully as she can hope to be, for the short remainder of her days."

As Margaret heard these words, it seemed that a veil had suddenly been withdrawn from the dark future of her life; and a prospect, calm, peaceful, full of hope and refreshment, was spread before her. For one moment she saw not the shadow of an objection. It brought relief to her mother's pride; certainty for her brother's prospects; comfort incalculable to herself and Beatrice. The next, came the solemn warning — "Lead us not into temptation." The Countess's face was crimsoned with joyful expectation and anxiety. Both to her and to Father Andrea it was an interval of overpowering suspense, until Margaret spoke, — in tones low and

gentle, yet firm, as derived from a power beyond her own.

"Beatrice! dearest of all! Heaven bless you for your love! Yet we must part."

Father Andrea started, and Beatrice turned away her head in deep despair.

"Forgive,—forgive me," exclaimed Margaret. "Miserable you may be, but not like me, for I am the cause of your misery. I have promised, not indeed to a human being, but in the secrecy of my own heart before God, that I will shun the path of temptation. My mind is unfixed, my principles are unsettled. If I go with you, I go where every thing that surrounds me will be a snare. Beatrice, I dare not."

The Countess raised herself, and her glassy wandering eye moved restlessly around the room. It rested at length upon Father Andrea. He was standing with his arm leaning upon the mantelpiece in gloomy silence. She beckoned him towards her, and, as he approached, said, "Father, have you no word?"

"When the heart is bent upon error, God alone can soften it," he said; and still and rigid, he stood at the foot of the sofa.

The eyes of the unhappy Countess closed for an instant, and Margaret drew near once more to bid farewell. Beatrice sat upright, and looked at her with a fixed, quiet gaze; and as Margaret stooped to kiss her, she said, in a voice, the tones of which thrilled fearfully on the ear,—"I am dying; yes, see!" she held out her long, taper fingers, and touched the lines of her thin wan face. "See, I am dying, and I shall die alone; Father Andrea will love me to the last, but none else. No mother! no sister! Servants to watch me in my last moments.—Margaret, have pity upon me!" and the proud

Countess Novera, clasping her hands in agony, threw herself at Margaret's feet. Margaret turned aside in misery, untold, unutterable; but the heart that was uplifted in prayer, was superior even to that fierce trial of human affection. She forced the Countess to rise, and laid her again upon the sofa, whilst in a tone of soothing gentleness, which acted, as if by a magic charm, upon the fevered, exhausted spirit, she said: "Beatrice, we have known the secrets of each other's hearts too well that you should doubt me. If my life could be given for yours, death would be welcome for your sake: but the God who has redeemed us is first with you; first must He also be with me."

The Countess's hand fell powerless by her side, and her head drooped upon the pillow. Father Andrea came forward in alarm. "We must risk no more," he said. "Miss Percival—" but Margaret's meek imploring glance melted the severity of his manner, and he added, "Daughter! this excitement may not continue."

"I will go," said Margaret.

The Countess feebly raised her hand, and her lips quivered.

"Say only that I am forgiven. Beatrice! dearest Beatrice! but one word, to prove that your love is unchanged!"

A faint sad smile, the smile of never-dying affection, lit up the Countess's face; — she attempted to speak, but her voice failed her. Margaret bent over her in silence: yet a ray of peace shone even upon that dark moment. For the last time she pressed her lips upon the Countess's forehead, and then obeying the confessor's signal of impatience, hurried from the room without trusting herself to look once more. Father Andrea followed her into the gallery. He stopped, and Margaret thought he would leave her;

but it was only to give an order that Lauretta should instantly go to her mistress; and they went on. No word was spoken by either. At the hall-door the carriage was waiting. Margaret turned to the confessor. "Father! must your blessing be denied to one most miserable?"

His sallow face assumed a death-like hue, and his voice shook. "Daughter! the God of mercy, and the Saviour of the world, bless you, and guide you into all truth!"

He placed her in the carriage. Margaret grasped his hand, unable to articulate a parting word. Father Andrea gazed upon her intently. A foreboding cloud gathered upon his lofty brow, and, returning the pressure with convulsive energy, he exclaimed, —

"Daughter, farewell! oh, let it not be — for ever!"

The fearful warning fell like lead upon Margaret's heart. At a rapid rate the carriage descended the hill; but Margaret was unconscious of its movement; and when again it stopped at the Grove, she was lifted from it insensible.

CHAPTER XLII.

The progress of time is but little observed by the busy world. Each moment comes burdened with its appointed work; yet the object to be accomplished is unperceived, until we are enabled to look back through the length of months and years, and trace the end from the beginning. And so in the course of that healing process, which is mercifully ordained to restore us to cheerfulness after suffering, day by day, as we are carried further from the scene of our trial, the burden upon our heart grows lighter; but the change is scarcely perceptible, until at last we are permittted to reach a haven of peace, and are startled and even pained to find ourselves once more happy. With the young, this restoration is comparatively soon effected; but it must come in its measure to all; for it is the appointment of God.

We build upon the ruins of our buried joys, as the Italians have built over the ruins of Herculaneum. The lava of time encrusts the scenes that have gone by, and upon it we raise for ourselves new homes, new friends, new hopes, new means of enjoyment. Yet it is not therefore that all which has been has ceased to be. Beneath the brightness of the present hour, the city of the past lies hid; and still in silence and solitude, or even at intervals in the business of life, will memory descend into that quiet world, to wander again through the deserted streets, amid the homes of the absent and the dead.

It was on a soft, misty, tranquil summer morning, that, in the early hours of the hallowed day of rest, Margaret Percival sat by herself in the garden of her mother's cottage, and indulged in a reverie of other days. But a few years had elapsed since, in the misery of a desolate heart, she had parted from the Countess Novera. In that time, how much had been endured of humiliation and self-denial! how much of charity learnt! of resignation practised, and perfected! Margaret could look back now, and acknowledge the hand of mercy which had brought her to the present hour. She could retrace with thankfulness the hours of illness and forced exertion, which preceded her departure from the Grove; the dreariness of her new home, whilst her spirit was burdened with grief; the affectionate solicitude of her uncle, and the soothing effect of the Church services; the gradual manner in which her mother had been led to consent to her plan for her brother; the pain which it had occasioned to George, and the self-reproach which it had renewed in Craven: and then the carrying out of the plan itself: the residence amongst strangers in a strange place; the wounded pride, checked by the remembrance that the duty was a sacred one, and of God's appointment; the long struggle before her spirit could be brought entirely into subjection; the frequent trials of patience and temper, and the hope which was uppermost through all. The suffering was over at length now. Margaret had gained her end. Her brother's college career had been honourable and distinguished; he had obtained a fellowship, and he now was an ordained minister of the Church of Christ, able to assist Mr. Sutherland as his curate; and Margaret was returned to live again amidst all she loved, and share the inestimable privileges of the Church in a home of piety and peace.

There was, indeed, much for which to be grateful in external circumstances, but more in her own heart. The growth of a subdued and chastened spirit in her mother, and the ripening of early Christian holiness in the children, were amongst the first of Margaret's outward blessings. Harriet was now all that she could require as a companion; gentle, modest, refined, humble-minded, and exercising an influence over the younger ones, which Margaret had scarcely hoped to obtain herself. Craven also had given increased proofs of steadiness of character; and Philip was said to be well-conducted at school. Even in thinking of Agatha, there was some comfort, for she was training into a submission to her husband, though she could not hope for happiness with him. But it was in the blessedness of her own situation, and the peacefulness of her own mind, that Margaret saw most reason to be thankful. On that day, her brother was to officiate, for the first time, in the House of God as a duly ordained minister of His Gospel. Her heart bounded with delight, as she felt that the blessing had been obtained through her instrumentality. Her sacrifice had been the means of George's happiness. Margaret did not wish for grateful expressions, though love and respect were shown in her brother's every word and action. She desired only to behold him a faithful clergyman of the English Church, and then her reward would be obtained.

The English Church! yes, Margaret had now learnt to look to no other. The steady adherence to the line which Mr. Sutherland had marked out, avoiding all controversy, all practices which, without being sanctioned, had a tendency to Romanism, and the carrying out, in private, the principles of the Church, had at length brought its recompence.

Margaret was no longer harassed by doubts. She could pray in secret without distraction, and join in public services and holy ordinances, in full confidence that they were the appointed means of grace and salvation. Her life was simple and retired, apparently without any grand object; but she desired no other. She had realised her high calling, as a member of the Catholic Church; and as no earthly honour could add to that dignity, so no earthly humiliation could detract from it. By it all duties were alike ennobled; and whether exerting herself actively for the poor, cheering her mother's loneliness, instructing the children, or studying for the improvement of her own mind, Margaret felt herself labouring for the advancement of Christ's Church, and her highest ambition was satisfied.

The present hour was blest; and in that dream of by-gone days, that sorrowing recollection of the past, there was still a remembrance of mercy.

When Margaret left the Countess Novera, the hope of the future, as connected with her, was a blank; but so it was not allowed to remain. Their intercourse had, indeed, ceased; and Margaret knew herself too well to indulge a wish for its renewal; but she was not left without sympathy, nor even without tidings to cheer her in sadness. Mr. Sutherland was ever ready to listen to and comfort her, by endearing attentions and advice, which joined the gentle tenderness of a woman's tact with the strength and confidence of a man. And he did for her what he did not dare give her permission to do for herself. He wrote both to the confessor and Lady Anstruther, and from them obtained information as to the Countess's health, although it was deemed desirable that Beatrice herself should not be agitated by knowing that any direct communication was

passing between them. Margaret was comforted in learning that the Countess was not left alone in her journey, as she had feared. Lucia was placed in a convent in England until a better opportunity could be found for her return; and Lady Anstruther then took the care of the dying Countess upon herself.

It was a precious charge; but one that was soon over. The Countess Novera lived but a few weeks after she reached Italy. Father Andrea himself gave the history of the hours which followed that sad return. He told of patience, humility, steadfast faith; all that Margaret most earnestly desired for her own death-bed; and he spoke also, strongly and confidently, of the eternal reward assured to the faithful members of the one true Church. Margaret trembled for a moment, but her heart was not shaken, as it once would have been. She could think of Beatrice as blest, whatever might have been the errors engrafted on her faith, and yet humbly trust that in the English Church she herself might find salvation.

Hope there was for both; hope, that when the veil should be withdrawn, light and peace would await them in the kingdom of immortality. Had it been otherwise, Margaret could little have endured the sight of those treasured remembrances upon which on this day — the calmest, the most fraught with gratitude and hope, of all which she had yet spent, — she gazed with the freshness and fulness of early affection. Before her lay the few tokens of love which the Countess had given her whilst they were together. One other was now added to them. It was a paper enclosing a soft, silky curl of dark hair, on which Margaret's eyes rested, until the tears, which blinded them, prevented her from reading the words that were

written, in scarcely legible characters, underneath the date —

"Severed by my own hand. In a few hours truth will be made clear. Margaret! most loved and precious! my last prayer is for you.

"BEATRICE NOVERA."

Earth has many trials, and death is bitter and tremendous; but the faith of Christianity can triumph over all.

A few hours later Margaret knelt before the altar, at which her uncle and her brother stood, as the ministers of the Most High, and from her inmost heart "blessed God's holy name for all His servants departed this life in His faith and fear;" whilst she "offered herself, her soul and body, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to Him," for His service, in the Church and the home which He had appointed her.

The awful rite was over, and Margaret walked alone on the smooth green lawn that fronted the cottage. Mr. Sutherland and George came up to her. George kissed her forehead, and whispered— "Margaret! on earth, it is you whom I must thank for my great happiness."

Margaret's smile was heavenly in its repose; and as Mr. Sutherland drew her arm affectionately within his, she turned to him, and said —

"Happiness to-day for us all. Yet there was a time when I could not have believed that truth and peace were to be found in the English Church."

THE END.

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